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ELECTRA.

A STORY OF LOVE AND MALICE.

BY LAURA C. FORD.

NEW YORK:
NORMAN L. MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
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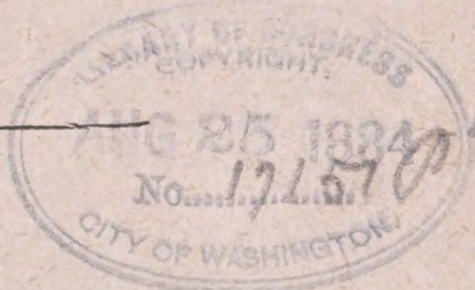
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ELECTRA.

A STORY OF LOVE AND MALICE.

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CHAPTER I.

A CRUEL STROKE.

BRIGHTLY shone the sunshine of the March morning, turning the sky into a plate of gold, with the sun itself blazing like a great jewel set in the east. The budding trees and the springing grass below gleamed in the radiance and seemed to rejoice in its unusual warmth—for there was not a breath of air stirring through all that golden splendor.

Nature was pervaded by that beautiful but ominous calm which tells that a storm is not far distant.

Down the turnpike road, glistening in the pure light, clattered two horses, each bearing a graceful rider.

Those riders were a young man and a young woman.

The young man was large, and was bronzed by the suns of foreign lands, and the young woman was queenly, and was as fair as the morning.

On they cantered, into the edge of the forest through which the road ran.

The lady's mettled steed suddenly shied and reared.

He had been frightened by a figure which had unexpectedly emerged into sight from among the great trees skirting the road—a figure wrapped in a scarlet hood and cloak, from which a dark, gypsy-like face looked.

The lady on the back of the startled horse, forgetting herself, perhaps, in the excitement of the moment, raised her whip and brought it sharply down on the red cloak.

"Get out of my way!" she said, angrily. "Don't you see, fool, that you are frightening my horse?"

The hand of the gentleman riding beside her, however,

was on her rein holding the startled animal with a grasp of iron.

"There is no danger," he said, reassuringly, and then speaking to the red-cloaked figure which was standing stock still there on the side of the road, he added:

"There is no harm done."

With that assurance, and with his hand still on the rein of the now subdued horse, he led the animal past the object which had occasioned his alarm, and in a minute the riders were cantering away at the same pace which had been interrupted, with the shadows of the forest trees falling darkly over them.

The girl in the red cloak stood in the road where they had left her staring after them, with her great black eyes as brilliant as diamonds and with a dark flush on her dusky face.

She thrust her hand from out the folds of her red cloak, and shook her fist after the retreating figures, while she said in a voice which the rising tears of passion rendered hoarse:

"You struck me with your whip, Kate Vance, as if I had been a dog; and ordered me out of your way, and I'll remember the debt, and pay you for it as sure as my name is Electra Dean! You will find that I will get *in* your way instead of *out* of it, Kate Vance! As sure as you live you will find that there *has* been harm done, although your handsome friend says not!"

The tears that welled up from passion into her eyes choked her voice, and blinded her so that she could not see any longer the two toward whom she was shaking her clinched fist, and when the obscuring drops fell from her lids to her flushed cheeks, the horses and riders had disappeared around a bend in the road.

Electra Dean turned and went on her way, but her eyes had not lost their angry glitter, nor her voice its angry ring, as she muttered:

"Yes, I *will* pay you back, Kate Vance, as sure as you live, for daring to strike me with your whip as if I had been a dog. As sure as you live you will find that I *will* get in your way, and that you can't drive me out of it! No—not if you brought every whip in the United States to help you!"

So saying, she went swiftly on her way, her small feet unconsciously planting a series of vicious stamps on the ground, while her passion was planting the seeds of a vengeful purpose in her soul, which was destined to bear a crop of thorns to be reaped by beautiful Kate Vance, the haughty heiress of "Silver Bend," the broadest, richest domain in Kentucky.

And that same beautiful and haughty heiress had no suspicion of the fact that, in yielding to the momentary passion which swept over her when she lifted her slender whip to let it fall on the shoulders of Electra Dean, that she had made a dangerous and unscrupulous enemy, whose malice would follow her long after she herself had forgotten its cause.

CHAPTER II.

A NIGHT OF STORM.

ALL day long the sun burned like a ball of fire in the sky, and not a breath of air stirred through the March day until near nightfall.

Then the wind seemed to throw off the fetters which had held it all the day long, and floated here and there on wings that were heavy with dampness, uttering low, shuddering sounds.

Like a ball of fire the sun went down in the west, and seemed to have ignited the clouds, for they glowed like flames of red and yellow, and the horizon presented the appearance of a great conflagration.

Then it died out, like a fire that has run its course, and a thick dark cloud spread over it, as if it was the smoke from the smoldering embers.

Louder rose the voice of the wind, and swifter grew its wings, until it groaned and shrieked among the tree-tops, bowing them down, and wrenching off the branches with the might of its power.

Rapidly the sky darkened, and the night fell, and through the gloom poured floods of rain and hail.

The drops gathered into streams and rushed down the sides of the great hills, and beat upon the little cabin in the ravine which sheltered the heads of Electra Dean and her old grandmother, commonly called Granny Dean.

The two were sitting together in front of the large fireplace, the stones of which, having long ago lost much of their cement, were gaping like snagged teeth, and were smoked to the blackness, and in some places to the polish of ebony.

"And you say that Kate Vance cut you with her whip?" the old woman said, turning her grizzled head, which was covered by a handkerchief knotted under her chin, toward her granddaughter, and lifting her cracked voice so as to be heard above the roar of the storm.

The young girl clinched the small brown hands that were lying in her lap, and the red firelight flickering over her showed the angry glitter that was in her black eyes

and the angry flush that was on her drawn face deepen in intensity.

"Yes, she did!" she answered sharply, through her teeth, that gleamed between her lips like those of an enraged wild animal. "But I'll make her pay for it, granny; as sure as I live I'll make her pay for it!"

"That's the way to talk. You've got your father's blood in you!" exclaimed the old woman, exultingly. "Nobody ever struck George Dean that didn't get back blow for blow!"

"But he got a blow at last that killed him," the girl said, turning her glittering eyes toward the fire, and drawing her black brows down over them.

"Yes, a curse on the black fiend that did it!" the old woman said, her palsied body beginning to shake from head to foot with rising passion. "That's another grudge that I would like to settle with somebody," she went on, her skinny fingers working nervously on the head of the stout cane she was holding between her knees. "The nigger belonged to Judge Sylvane, and he had money enough to clear him on the plea that he had acted in self-defense; but he had sense enough not to keep him in my reach. He sent him away down South somewhere."

"Where is Judge Sylvane?" Electra asked, her mind diverted for a minute from her own grievance. "He moved his family South, too, didn't he?"

"I don't know where he went—as I've told you a hundred times," the old woman replied, snappishly. "If he had stayed about here I would have tormented him well, I promise you!"

All this time the storm had been raging furiously; the rain and hail had been pelting the old roof above them; the wind had been wrenching the moldy shingles from it, and had been sprinkling it with twigs torn from the groaning trees.

As the old woman ended her sentence there was a loud crash, as if made by a falling tree, and a half minute afterward there came a sharp knock on the cabin door.

"Good Lord! Who can that be?" Granny Dean ejaculated, rising with an effort from the ragged chair on which she had been sitting, and leaning heavily on her cane, with her shriveled face turned toward the door, which Electra was unbolting.

As she drew back the wooden bar, it flew open, urged by the strong wind, with so much violence that the girl was almost knocked down by it, and as she reeled on her feet, some one passed in, as if he, too, were driven by the wind, and swiftly closed and secured the door again behind him.

He was a large man, dripping with rain, and glistening with hail, and presenting a generally wind-blown appearance, as if he were an embodiment of the storm.

"I beg your pardon," he said, catching his breath which the wind had evidently taken. "But you see I was caught out in the storm, and had no time to wait on ceremony; for the trees were falling about me in every direction; and I was very glad when my horse brought me to your door for shelter."

He had taken off his hat, and holding it in his hand, he had advanced toward the fire, and stood before it on the broken hearth, with the ruddy glow of the blazing wood lighting up his large form and his strong, pleasing face.

He caught Electra's eye as she stood leaning against the rough wall, and a look of recognition flashed into his countenance.

"It was you we met this morning," he said, speaking in an impulsive way. "You were the person in the red cloak. I recognize your eyes."

"Yes, I was the person who received a lash across the shoulders from Miss Vance's whip," she responded, her voice sounding very harsh, although it was naturally melodious.

As she spoke, she moved from her position against the wall, and drew forward a rickety chair for the accommodation of the guest.

Granny Dean stiffly resumed her own chair, and fixed her bright gray eyes suspiciously on the young gentleman as he sank into the proffered seat, while Electra placed herself again upon the stool from which she had arisen to open the door.

Notwithstanding the hard, defiant look that was on her dusky face, the young man seemed to find something strongly attractive in it, for he never removed his eyes from it for fully five minutes—during which she had kept it turned persistently toward the fire—not even in answering the questions with which Granny Dean plied him.

"It was you, then, that was with Kate Vance when she struck 'Lec to-day, was it?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say that in her sudden fright Miss Vance was rude," he said, deprecatingly; whereat Electra shrugged her shoulders, and scowled at the fire.

"I was very sorry for the act, and I have no doubt Miss Vance was also," he went on, using still that deprecating tone, and keeping his eyes still on the dusky face turned toward the fire.

"If she ain't sorry for it, the time may come when——"

The old woman's cracked voice was suspended in the

middle of her menacing sentence by a flash from her granddaughter's black eyes, and by the sharp reminder:

"Granny, it was *my* shoulders Miss Vance struck. And please, don't you have anything to say about it."

The young gentleman also caught a momentary glance from the flashing eyes as they returned to their contemplation of the fire, and he seemed to feel that *he* had better not have anything to say about the insult she had received either; so a minute or so of embarrassed silence fell over the group on which the firelight flickered, and over which the rain and hail pattered.

"Mrs. Dean," he said, evidently surprising the old woman very much by calling her name; "you have, of course forgotten me, if indeed you ever remembered me, but I recollect you very distinctly. I used to live in this neighborhood when I was a boy. I am Ray Sylvane, the only child of Judge Sylvane who lived five miles from here at Beechwood Farm."

The old woman's gray eyes emitted sparks like flint struck from steel.

"I've got good cause to remember the Sylvanes," she said as sharply as her toothless jaws would permit her voice to sound. "It was through them that I lost *my* only child—'Lec's father—Judge Sylvane's negro killed him. And Judge Sylvane's money cleared the murderer! Ah, I've got good cause to remember the Sylvanes!"

A look of real distress was in the young man's face, on which the color came and went in swift waves.

He could have kicked himself for his stupidity in mentioning his name; for his stupidity for forgetting that cornfield tragedy which had so greatly interested him at the time, and which seemed to interest him more now than it had ever done before, as he turned his eyes involuntarily upon the daughter of the murdered man.

He remembered that it had been clearly proven at the trial that the negro had acted in self-defense, and he had rejoiced at the time at his acquittal. Now, looking at that singularly graceful figure on the stool, he felt that he would be glad if he had been hanged for it. But he didn't say so, and hastened to change the conversation by remarking on the continued violence of the storm.

No one responded to the remark, and five minutes afterward, when the conscious silence had grown unbearable to him, the old woman rose stiffly to her feet.

"If you see fit to do so, you may stay here by the fire," she said; adding to her granddaughter:

"Come, 'Lec, it's time for us to go to bed." And the young girl arose and followed her as she hobbled from the

room and disappeared through the doorway of another small chamber opening into it.

When the gray dawn broke over the drenched earth, Electra Dean stole softly into the room where the young gentleman was still sleeping on the bare floor before the yawning fireplace, and she bent and peered curiously down into his bearded face.

He stirred uneasily, and she caught the mutter:

"On the tenth of April, Kate; on our wedding-day!"

"So that's what is on hand!" Electra Dean muttered, her teeth gleaming through her parted lips in an unpleasant way. "But as sure as you live, Kate Vance, you will not marry Ray Sylvane on the tenth of April!"

Then she bent over him again, and waked him with no gentle touch on the shoulder.

CHAPTER III.

A HAUNTING FACE.

"WHAT a singularly attractive creature that black-eyed girl is!" Ray Sylvane muttered, as he picked his way over the drenched ground, stepping from rock to rock on his way to Silver Bend the morning after the storm—for naturally enough he had not been able to find the horse he had left untethered at the cabin door.

All along the mile of mud and slush that lay between the cabin of Granny Dean and the home of his betrothed, he was thinking of the gypsy-like face and graceful form he had seen the firelight flickering over the night before. He made no effort to banish the image that haunted his memory with its dusky beauty, but if he *had* tried to do so, it is not probable that he would have succeeded—it had taken such a strong hold upon his fancy.

He was a poet and an artist; and the girl with her wild, picturesque beauty had aroused a deep admiration in his imaginative nature; and as he went on, unconsciously picking his way so as to avoid pools of water and mud and slush, he made a picture of her as a gypsy queen, with her dusky subjects in the background, and with the light of the camp fire throwing a glow over her, as the cabin fire had done the night before. Again she was Cleopatra reclining under the silken sails of her vessel; again she was a Spanish beauty; again the Light of the Harem. And so, by the time he reached Silver Bend she had been the model of more pictures than he was likely ever to paint, for his industry by no means equaled his talent.

As he walked up the avenue of pine-trees Miss Vance came hurrying to meet him down the snowy shell walk.

"Oh, Ray, I have been so unhappy about you!" she ex-

claimed, reaching her white hands out so as to place one on either of his shoulders, and looking eagerly into his face with her clear blue eyes. "Your horse came home this morning saddled and bridled, and I have been imagining all sorts of terrible things. What happened to you?"

He took her hands from his shoulders, and held them in his own as he answered laughingly:

"I was caught by the storm, and in the darkness and confusion I lost my way, and in default of better lodgings I took shelter in old Mrs. Dean's cabin and stayed there all night, and here I am safe and sound!"

Miss Vance laughed, showing her strong white teeth to great advantage:

"I wonder that you survived to tell the tale," she said, commiseratingly. "What a terrible night you must have passed in that old shanty, with the crone and her half-savage granddaughter for company."

The consciousness of what very interesting companionship he had found in that same granddaughter, brought a glow to his bronzed face, but he did not mention the fact.

Strangely enough, a feeling of guilt came over him, which made him avert his eyes from the face of his betrothed as he walked on beside her to the house.

He remembered how many pictures he had made of that same "half savage" as he came along that morning. He remembered how persistently her face had haunted his thoughts, and how the fairer one of his betrothed had never once arisen between it and him.

It was that which had caused the feeling of guilt which had swept over him. It was that which caused him to turn after a minute with a great deal of tenderness toward his companion, and say:

"So you were uneasy about me, Kate? I am afraid you care a great deal more about me than I deserve. You love me a great deal, do you not?"

They were entering the stately house by this time, and she did not answer until they were seated together on a sofa in the luxurious parlor, with her white hands still imprisoned in his.

"Yes, Ray, I care a great deal about you," she said, her queenly head bent slightly forward, and her clear eyes looking into his own. "My love for you is the strongest thing in my nature, except my pride and temper."

"It should be stronger than anything," he responded, in a slightly aggrieved tone; "seeing that in three weeks time we are to be married."

She threw back her handsome head and laughed, pleas-

ed, perhaps, to see that her words had nettled him, before she replied, which she did, seriously enough:

"This morning, when I was so tortured with uneasiness about you, I realized, for the first time, that I would rather give up my life than you. And yet, Ray, I would do it, and break my heart about it afterward, perhaps, if anything—any act of yours, I mean—occurred, to bring my pride or my temper up between us. I know myself so well, that I know I would give you up in either case."

He glanced away from her and moved uneasily, with that feeling of conscious guilt again bringing an unusual glow to his bronzed face.

She was a grand-looking woman, this betrothed wife of his, but even while he sat there with her hands clasped in his, the dusky face of Electra Dean kept rising between them, and somehow, he could not have told why, it brought that guilty feeling over him.

But never had Kate Vance found him so tender a lover as he was all that day. He did not seem willing to lose sight of her for an instant; for, as sure as she left his side, he began to make pictures again, with the beautiful "half savage," as Miss Vance had called her, for his model.

It was his last day at Silver Bend. In the morning he was going away, and when he came again it would be to claim his bride, and to start with her on the European tour they had planned to take.

It was late when he bade her good-night and went up to his own room.

But he did not retire. He seated himself by his window instead, and gazed out on the slender crescent of the new moon that crowned the March night.

As he sat there, he was no longer the lover whispering tender things to the image of his betrothed as he had been doing all day, but he was the artist painting picture after picture of the same model.

And that model was Electra Dean.

Suddenly he arose to his feet, and jerked down the curtain with an impatient gesture.

"Confound the girl!" he muttered, angrily, "I believe she has bewitched me! I can't get rid of her."

He began immediately to prepare himself to retire, but even in his broken dreams he was making pictures of Electra Dean.

The next morning he left Silver Bend, to return for his bride in three weeks.

CHAPTER IV.

A WILD FLOWER.

It was late in the afternoon of the tenth of April.

It was the evening appointed for the marriage of Ray Sylvane and Kate Vance.

The young gentleman had arrived in the neighboring village early that morning, and had put up at the Red Star, the only hotel in the small town.

He had taken dinner at Silver Bend in company with his betrothed, and her father—a widower whose only child she was.

Never had lover been more tender than Ray Sylvane, and never had a betrothed bride been more sweetly kind than Kate Vance that day.

At five o'clock they parted at the end of the avenue of pines.

"It is our last good-bye," he said, bending to drop a kiss on her white forehead. "In four hours more you will be mine to keep and to hold till death do us part."

"Till death do us part," she repeated; adding with strange earnestness, "I would rather death should part us than anything else."

"Nothing else shall—nothing else can," he said, lifting her hand to his bearded lips, and then vaulting into his saddle, and cantering away on a horse which a negro boy had been holding for him.

He turned and waved her a good-bye with his hand, and neither of them dreamed that a longer time than four hours would pass before they should meet again.

He turned the head of his horse toward the village, but as he entered the forest through which the road ran, a memory came to him of the red-cloaked figure he had encountered on that very spot three weeks before.

So vividly the dark, beautiful face, with its flashing eyes, rose up before his mental vision, that it was as if her actual presence had appeared before him.

He drew his rein, suddenly checking his horse in his brisk canter, and then rode on slowly under the trees through which the April sunshine dropped in golden fragments upon him.

The strange infatuation which had set him to making so many pictures of her three weeks ago, came over him again.

At a point in the road where a bridle-path entered it, he drew rein, and looked irresolutely along the shady way.

Then, with a swift movement of his hand, he turned his horse in that direction, and rode away through the narrow avenue between the great trees.

It terminated in a ravine, over the mossy stones of which he cantered until he came in sight of the little cabin of Granny Dean, where he had sought shelter from the storm three weeks before, and where he had watched with such curious interest the beautiful, graceful figure over which the firelight flickered.

What the nature of that interest was, he had never tried to discover.

He was a careless man of the world, leading that butterfly sort of existence which caused him to grasp the passing hour, and to gather all the honey he could out of it without questioning its quality, or seeking to analyze it.

He had but followed that instinct when he turned into the bridle-path, and he followed it still when he halted at the door of Granny Dean's cabin.

The old woman was nodding in her chair, and Electra, with the scarlet strings of her broad hat tied under her chin, was standing in the middle of the room, wrapping some paper around a small vial.

She looked up with a start as his shadow darkened the doorway, and hastily concealed the vial in her hand, while a dark, rich color stained her dusky face with a deeper glow, and her black eyes widened with surprise.

"How do you do, Miss Electra," he said, holding out his hand, and speaking in a subdued tone, possibly out of consideration for the slumbers of her grandmother.

The girl placed her small brown hand in the fairer, softer one he extended toward her, and invited him to enter, speaking in a confused way.

"No, no," he said, "it is bright and pleasant outside, and as I only called by for a minute in passing to inquire after—your grandmother, we will sit out here on the rocks and not disturb her by our voices, as I see she is asleep."

He had detained her hand in his, and had drawn her outside the cabin by a gentle pressure, and then he seated himself on one of the large, flat rocks with which the ravine abounded, and she dropped mechanically upon one near by.

The surprise had died out of her eyes now, and in its stead had come a feverish glitter.

"Were you going out?" he asked, glancing at her hat.

"Yes," she answered, "I was going to the village."

"I will only detain you for a few minutes," he said in return, "but I could not help calling to thank you again for giving me shelter from the storm that night. Do you know that I feel that I owe my life to your kindness? I should most assuredly have been crushed by a falling tree but for the protection of your home."

"It was a poor shelter," she said, drawing her black brows down over her eyes, "for a grand gentleman like you, but such as it was, I am sure you were welcome to it."

A tiny stream of crystal water ran along at his feet, and he stooped over and dipped up a few drops in the palm of his hand, with which he moistened his lips in a sort of unconscious way.

"I will bring a cup," she said; and unheeding the quick objection he made, she arose and went into the house, and going to the little corner cupboard she took down a cup of coarse ware, and with her eyes glittering, she filled it with water from a bucket on the table, and then hastily drew the cork from the small vial she had been concealing in her hand and poured half of the colorless contents into it.

"I had intended to have put this in his coffee to-night at the hotel if possible—now I will put it in the water," she muttered.

So saying, she replaced the stopper in the vial, and thrusting it into her bosom, she picked up the cup of drugged water, and went out with it to him where he was still sitting on the mossy rock.

"You know we have a spring of mineral water near here, I expect; every one knows of it in the neighborhood, and this is some of it, I brought it fresh from the spring just before you came. Drink it, it will do you good."

He did know of the sulphur spring which had enjoyed local fame in his boyhood, so with a smile of thanks he took the cup from her hand, and quaffed the contents, keeping back a grimace at its unpalatableness, and setting the empty cup down beside him.

She resumed her seat on the rock, picking nervously at the grass which sprung up in its crevices, while he commented on the beauty of the evening, all the time seeming to be content with viewing the beauty of her richly tinted face.

In a very few minutes a thin silvery veil seemed to be drawn between him and her, and a delicious languor stole over him, through which his own voice as he talked, and hers as she replied, seemed to sound from afar off.

Then the veil thickened and thickened between them until he could not see her any more.

He rubbed his eyes drowsily, and made an effort to rise, with a dim consciousness over him that it was time for him to go; but, instead of rising to his feet, he fell prostrate on his back on the mossy stones, with his senses locked in a deep sleep.

Electra arose and knelt down beside him.

"You will hardly be married to-night, Miss Kate Vance,"

she muttered throbbingly. "You may, perhaps, feel as deeply insulted as I did three weeks ago when you struck me with your whip!"

She arose, and going to the tree to which he had tethered the horse, she loosened the rein, and led the animal into a dense copse, and hitched him where he could not be seen by any chance passer-by.

The hours passed on, the night fell, and the stars arose over the man who was that night to have been a bridegroom, but who slumbered heavily on in utter unconsciousness of the fact.

And they arose also over Silver Bend, where the wedding guests assembled, and where the wedding feast grew cold on the table, and where the bride in her snowy robes waited for the bridegroom who did not come.

And they arose over the little cottage of Granny Dean, where Electra sat until it was late in the night, crouching on the hearth, with the dying fire lapping out little tongues of flame here and there, and throwing fitful gleams on her flushed face and in her shining eyes.

Her red lips were compressed, and her low forehead was knotted.

There was a tumult at her brain and heart which had never been there before—and which was an entirely undreamed-of experience to her.

She had grown up there in that little cabin with her grandmother, with no more care bestowed upon her training, no more effort to turn the tendrils of her character in this or that direction, than was given to the wild vines and flowers whose vagrant beauty adorned the hillsides.

She had no companions save her grandmother, and the birds, and the squirrels, and the flowers, nor did she desire any other.

She had no education beyond the little knowledge of reading and writing which her dissolute father had taught her, and that which she learned from nature's open pages.

She had never had a lover, and she had grown up without any of those rosy dreams of love which come as naturally to young people as flowers come to the spring-time.

But a sudden awakening had come to her; and as she sat there late into the night with the flickering firelight playing over her, and with that novel tumult at her heart and brain, she fully realized the fact that the awakening had come, and that she was madly in love with high-born Ray Sylvane.

"I would a thousand times rather see him dead than married to any one!" she muttered fiercely through her little white teeth, involuntarily clinching her fists. "And he never shall marry any one if I can prevent it even at

the risk of my life! I prevented it this time, and I would find means to prevent it again!"

The strength of her unbridled nature showed itself in her face, which was flushed and drawn, and also in the way she clinched her fingers until the nails cut into her palms.

The idea that Ray Sylvane would come to reciprocate her love never for an instant crossed her mind; she too thoroughly understood the wide distance, in every respect, that separated them, to indulge, even for an instant, in such a hope.

She felt that she was powerless to touch his heart; but in the matter of throwing obstructions between him and any other woman, she felt that she was strong.

"While I live he shall never marry any one else!" she muttered. "I swear it before all the saints and angels!"

She reached out and took the wooden poker from the corner near, and traced a cross with it in the glowing ashes, perhaps intending to substitute that sign for the kiss on the Bible which usually seals an oath.

CHAPTER V.

AN AWAKENING.

ALL night long the stars looked down on Ray Sylvane, and the dew fell upon him as he lay there on the mossy stones, with his face upturned, wrapped in the heavy, dreamless sleep which the subtle drug had brought to him.

He awoke with the cold, gray dawn fanning him—awoke to a dull recognition of himself, and to a sharp sense of the rheumatic twinges that racked his limbs.

Where was he?

He raised himself stiffly and painfully to a sitting posture, and stared dazedly around.

Above him was the leaden sky; before him were the tall hills with the fog lifting from the ravine between them; beneath him were the mossy stones; and behind him was the moldy cottage of Granny Dean.

His hat had fallen from his head, and was lying crushed by his own shoulder at a little distance from him, and he raised his arm and ran his fingers in a bewildered way through his damp hair.

How came he there?

The question came dully into his throbbing head, as he stared around him.

The birds were awaking, and here and there a note from their tuneful throats broke through the foggy atmosphere; but he heard them as one hears sounds when in a state of

semi-consciousness, and still he stared dazedly, and still the dull question came into his benumbed mind:

"What does it mean?"

Suddenly remembrance came to him.

It was brought by the low whinny of his horse in the clump of trees where Electra had concealed him.

As if the familiar sound were fraught with magic power a flood of light broke into his mind. Memory came back to him link by link, until the entire chain of events of the evening before and their possible consequences were before him.

The dawn should have found him the husband of Kate Vance!

Great drops broke out on his face, and trickled in streams over it, as the realization of the effect his non-appearance would have on the woman who waited vainly for him in her bridal robes rushed over him.

"My God, what must she think of me!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, springing to his feet, without noticing the sharp pains the damp chill night had brought to his limbs.

He strode to the door of the cabin and knocked loudly on it with his knuckles.

From the thin column of smoke rising out of the dingy chimney, he knew that one at least of the two occupants of the domicile was astir, and by the lightness of the step that crossed the bare floor in answer to his summons, he knew it was the girl.

The bolt was drawn back, the door was swung open, and, in her dark, picturesque beauty, Electra appeared before him.

She saw that his face was flushed, and that his eyes were glittering with anger, and her red lips parted in a smile, showing the rows of pearly teeth between them.

Ray Sylvane grasped her round arm firmly, and drew her outside the house.

"I want to talk to you where we will not be interrupted," he said, sternly. Then looking down into the brilliant black eyes which she uplifted fearlessly to his as she stood before him on the mossy rocks, he asked:

"What, in the name of Satan, ever induced you to play such a trick on me?"

"What trick?" she asked, with sly dimples in her cheeks, which glowed with the mellow wine color of an autumn sunset.

"Why do you ask that?" he responded, with angry impatience. "You know as well as I do, that I am here this morning because of the drugged water you gave me to drink yesterday evening."

"Drugged water!" She shrugged her shoulders, and

laughed as she uttered the words. "What do I know about drugs? What do I know about anything except hard work and poverty?"

He made an impatient movement, and his hand, the muscles of which were as firm as fine steel, closed more tightly around her wrist.

"It is as little use for you to deny that the cup of water you gave me had in it some powerful drug to produce sleep, as it would be for you to acknowledge it, because it could make no difference now; and what I demand to know is, what induced you to do it. Answer me that! Have you any idea of the terrible mischief you did by it? Do you know that last night was to have been my wedding-night?"

For the first time since he had been looking into it there in the gray dawn, he saw the gypsy-like face contract and flush with passion.

"Every one for miles and miles around, knew that Miss Vance expected to be married last night; and you may be sure that I didn't forget it, because she gave me a keepsake on my shoulder with her riding whip, and I sha'n't forget her—no—I sha'n't forget her!"

She vibrated from head to foot with passion which she seemed to be striving to hold in restraint, for she shut her small teeth together in a way that suggested to him, as he noticed it, the locked doors of a prison.

A flood of light came into his understanding.

He comprehended the bitter malice, the thirst for revenge in her untamed nature, which had controlled her when she gave him the narcotic.

"You beautiful devil!" he exclaimed, flinging her arm from his hand, in order to strike her, "you have sacrificed me—me, whose feelings toward you were something more than kind!"

He turned and left her, and going to the thicket from whence the low, complaining whinny of the horse had been coming at intervals, he unhitched the bridle, and mounting into the saddle he rode away to the village, with a feeling of shame over him that made him shrink even from the sight of birds as he passed along, with a miserable idea that they, soulless things though they were, must hold him in contempt.

How then could he meet the accusing glance of his fellow-men, the very meanest of whom he felt would not, for the salvation of life itself, stand in the light in which he must appear.

And how could he explain his conduct? How could he cleanse it of the appearance of pitiful meanness that covered it as if it were nauseous slime?

He could not tell the sensational story that he had been drugged into forgetfulness by Electra Dean.

No one would believe the assertion, and he shrank from making it with a sensitive consciousness of the ridicule it would bring on him.

These harassing thoughts occupied his mind as he rode to the village, and they only deepened his misery.

He went to the Red Star hotel, shrinking from the curious eyes of every one he met; and being keenly sensible to every indication, he noticed that not a hat was lifted to him, although he passed three old gentlemen who had been friends of his father, and had petted him in his boyhood.

The hostler to whom he threw his bridle, as well as the usually obsequious proprietor of the house, looked at him with contemptuous curiosity, but nothing more.

"I have fallen so in the scale of esteem that I can hardly go down any further," he muttered, as he made his way to his room.

There he took from his trunk a sheet of paper, all four sides of which he covered in protestations to Miss Vance that his non-appearance the evening before had been unavoidable. It was interspersed with expressions of profound regret that he could not explain the cause of his detention, but implored her to trust him, to shelter him still in her love, and to let the marriage between them take place that evening as it had been set to do the evening before.

It was an incoherent document which he hurriedly scribbled off, and which he hired a small boy to take to Silver Bend, and to bring back the answer.

Then he shut himself up in his room and waited, feeling that his very life hung upon the issue of that appeal. For, now that she seemed to be snatched from him, he felt that Kate Vance was the queen among woman; the pearl beyond price.

CHAPTER VI.

A GATHERING STORM.

THE interest which Electra Dean had awakened in Ray Sylvane was due wholly to the artistic element in his nature.

She was beautiful; she was picturesque; she was rare. Therefore, she attracted and captivated his fancy, but she did not touch his heart, as a dim suspicion began to dawn upon him that she had—a vague hint whispered to his own soul that had brought a feeling of guilt over him.

But as he walked restlessly about his room, waiting, with his heart beating with overpowering tumultuousness,

for an answer to his appeal, he knew that he had been mistaken in the suspicion.

He knew that more to him than anything else on earth—more even than life itself, notwithstanding her faults of pride and temper, was Kate Vance, with her regal presence and her handsome refined face.

What would she think when she read his letter? Would she forgive him, and take him back to her trust and love again?

Would she consent for the marriage to take place that evening?

Over and over again he kept asking himself these questions, while the anxious minutes trailed slowly by to the stormy march which his heart was beating.

Would the messenger never return?

Scarcely an hour had passed since he left, yet to Ray Sylvane it seemed that many had intervened since he put the note into his hand.

Perhaps he was detained to wait for the answer she was writing.

Of course she would write an answer, but what would it be?

He began to speculate as to the words with which she would express her forgiveness—for his intense desire for forgiveness had brought the belief that he would receive it—and he had framed several very tender letters to himself by the time the messenger returned.

"Give me the letter!" he cried, as the boy, who belonged to the order of street waifs, appeared.

In buffeting with the world the young ragamuffin had grown preternaturally shrewd and suspicious, so when the gentleman held out his hand for the letter he was sure the boy had brought, that shrewd individual, instead of giving it to him, drew back with his hands in his pockets and said with a wag of his unkempt head:

"Lemme me see the color of yer money fust."

Ray Sylvane thrust his hand into his vest pocket and drew out a silver coin.

"There, take that and give me the letter," he said impatiently.

Whereupon the boy took off his ragged hat and took an envelope from the crown which, holding gingerly between his dirty fingers, he extended to Ray.

The young gentleman snatched it from him; glanced eagerly at the superscription, and then let it fall to the floor at his feet.

"What do you mean, rascal?" he cried out, grasping the boy by the shoulder and shaking him until his teeth chattered. "What do you mean, you young scoundrel, by

bringing my own letter back to me? Where is the one the lady sent?"

The boy gasped and choked, and then blubbered out, digging his knuckles into his eyes:

"That's the letter wot the old man giv' me to bring you, I never seen the young leddy; she be sick abed, the old man said."

Ray Sylvane released the ragamuffin's shoulder and sank down on a chair, feeling as if there were a lump in his throat that half suffocated him, while the boy took the opportunity to slip out, proudly jingling the silver coin against a brass button in his pocket.

Ray Sylvane, staring stupidly down at his returned letter, every word of which he had written as if the pen had been dipped in his heart's blood, noticed some penciled lines on the envelope, which he hastily proceeded to read.

They were not written by Kate, but were in the characters made by the tremulous hand of her old father, and were few and to the point:

"SIR,—At my daughter's request I return this letter to you. At her request, also, I abstain from horsewhipping you.
RICHARD VANCE."

The envelope had been opened. He took the letter from it, and his eyes caught sight of some delicately traced words on the margin above the heading.

His heart throbbed as if it would beat its way out of his bosom as he recognized that writing.

It was Kate's, and he read the words with an eagerness with which he had never read anything before; and they filled him with a hopelessness that nothing else had ever done.

There were only eight words, and they were:

"Never let me look upon your face again."

The paper fell from Ray Sylvane's hands, and his head drooped over on his breast.

"Henceforth I have nothing to live for," he muttered, huskily, "she was my all in all."

And the first tears that had dimmed his eyes since he had stood over his mother's grave, now almost a score of years ago, welled into them.

They dropped over another grave—the grave of a great hope.

"For this, I have to thank Electra Dean!" he whispered, after a minute. "In order that her enemy might be tainted, she poisoned her friend. It was a mad, cruel thing—a thing hard to forgive."

It was easy to make impressions on his peculiarly sensitive nature, and those impressions were hard to efface;

and sitting among the ruins of his hopes, in the shadow of the desolation which she had brought upon him a feeling of bitter resentment arose within him against Electra Dean.

Not only had his happiness been destroyed, but his honor had been blackened in the eyes of the world—an indelible stain had been thrown upon his fair name.

And he could not forgive the wrong.

He told himself that over and over again as he sat there in his room brooding forlornly; and he told himself so again as he sat in the cars that were bearing him away an hour afterward from the place to which he had gone with such high hope, and which he left with such bitter despair.

“I can never forgive her, and in the time to come she may find it out,” he muttered, gazing out of the narrow window of the car at the sky, over which a storm was gathering.

CHAPTER VII.

AN ARROW IN THE HEART.

THE extent of the pain and mortification which Kate Vance experienced in the humiliating disappointment touching her proposed marriage, was known only to herself.

Although it gnawed her heart, and drew the bloom from her cheeks, and the light from her eyes, she kept its presence hidden under the mask of indifference which her towering pride furnished.

She knew that her disappointment was a delicious morsel in the mouths of those who had envied her for her wealth and beauty, and who had hated her for her haughtiness, and that knowledge was to her like the bitterness of death. Yet she concealed it under an appearance of the calmest indifference.

Even on that terrible evening of the tenth of April, when she had waited in her bridal attire for the bridegroom who did not come, she had maintained her composure.

She had even gone down into the parlors and mingled with her guests, and had also presided at the wedding feast which made such a mocking display on the glittering table, with her usual queenly grace, albeit it was with a face as colorless as marble, and with eyes that glittered feverishly.

Yet no one who looked upon her could go away saying that the blow had crushed her. They could only wonder at her fortitude and her seeming indifference.

Only the stars that looked in through her window when

the lights had been extinguished and the tables cleared, could have borne witness to the anguish that rended her soul as she lay all night long prostrate on the floor of her room, with her cold hands clasped over her heart, and with her face as white and rigid as that of a corpse. Only the stars could have told that, but the secret was safe in their eternal silence.

So the gray dawn had crept upon her. But an hour afterward, when she entered her father's presence, to request of him that he would make no effort to avenge the deep insult, she was as passionless as marble.

"The least that is said about it the sooner it will be forgotten," she declared. "So I wish you to treat Ray Sylvane as I shall do, with silent contempt. I wish the whole affair to be buried, and no attempted vengeance on your part or mine, to raise a monument over it to perpetuate its memory.

Her father had yielded to her entreaties, and, save for those few bitter lines traced on the letter he had written to her, no notice was taken of Ray Sylvane.

After that she had retired to her room again, and had remained there all day, prostrated by a headache, the pain of which was only surpassed by that which gnawed her heart. But it was the first and the last sign of any effect the humiliation had upon her, so far as the inmates of her own home, even, knew.

She rode and drove and visited as before, and the name of Ray Sylvane never passed her lips, and, of course, no one mentioned it to her; the most daring and malicious of her acquaintances never ventured to do so.

Did she love Ray Sylvane still?

If she had put the question to herself, she would have answered that she hated him with a burning hatred. But she never did put the question to herself; the mere suspicion seemed utterly preposterous. For how could she entertain any passion but hatred toward one who had so wantonly humiliated her.

That any insurmountable obstacle had arisen to prevent his fulfillment of the marriage contract, never for an instant found lodgment in her mind. She believed he had, for some reason, what she did not know, repented of the bargain, and had at the last moment backed out of it.

Whatever motive actuated him, no hint of it reached her save a suggestion contained in an ill-spelled, badly written anonymous communication that came to her through the post a few days after the disappointment, written by the spiteful hand of Electra Dean.

That communication was to the effect that Ray Sylvane

had spent the evening appointed for his marriage in company with another woman.

Miss Vance had read the lines with her face growing gray and set, and had crumpled it in her hand, and then applied a lighted match to it, and so had burned it.

But as the days glided on into weeks Silver Bend grew more and more intolerable to her, and early in May she announced to her father her wish to be taken to the sea-shore, and the old gentleman, who had no will superior to hers, readily agreed, and to the sea-shore they accordingly went.

They selected a quiet fishing village as their abiding place for the remainder of the spring and the summer, and hired a pretty, comfortable cottage on the coast.

"Ah," Miss Vance said to herself, drawing a long breath as she stood alone on the sandy beach the day of her arrival, glancing across the broad water that reflected the sunset hues like a great palette. "For the first time since the tenth of April I feel that I can breathe freely. Here there is nothing to remind me of *him*; here there is no fear that I shall at some unexpected moment look upon his treacherous face!"

It was an attractive place, that pretty, picturesque village, especially to world-weary people who found its quiet a refreshing change to the feverish unrest of busy life, and not a few sought it in the summer months. But as it was so early in the season there were comparatively few guests at the modest hotels and cottages; so Miss Vance enjoyed the ocean view in the solitude she coveted that evening, for she was entirely alone on the beach against which the waves washed dreamily.

Far away in the distance, with the sunset gleaming over it, she saw the white sail of an on-coming ship.

It added to the peacefulness of the scene, for it looked like a snowy bird gliding slowly over the burnished waters; and she watched it with a delicious calm stealing over her which she had not enjoyed for many a day before.

The sunset glory died away, and the twilight crept like a silvery cloud where it had been; and the sailing ship came steadily on, nearer and nearer.

"She is heading for the village," Miss Vance said, pointing to the ship, and speaking to her father, who had sauntered down to the beach to keep her company.

"Vessels touch here frequently," the old gentleman said, "to put off passengers and freight."

"I wonder who the passengers will be that this one brings," Kate responded a look of discontent coming into her face. "I wish no one would come here this summer."

"I wish so too," her father replied, stroking his long,

silvery beard, "but we can hardly hope to escape companionship, for the world is full of restless people, and we are apt to jostle against them, even if we should go to the ice vales of Siberia."

Then he began to point out the features of the darkening landscape which seemed to him the most pleasing, and as he was fond of hearing his own eloquence, his daughter allowed him to enlarge uninterruptedly on the beauties which he discovered.

The round moon rose over the ocean, softly lighting the ship that came silently and gracefully on like a conscious thing.

A hundred yards above the spot where Colonel Vance and his daughter were standing and watching it, it cast anchor.

A small boat left its side and was rowed to the shore.

In that boat were two passengers, and as they stepped from it to the land, the outlines of their forms were clearly revealed to the eyes of Miss Vance in the pure moonlight, although they were a hundred yards distant.

She pressed her hand over her heart and uttered a low cry, which blended with the moan of the waves washing on the shore.

In the larger of these two forms she had recognized the person of Ray Sylvane.

With the sharp pain that struck like an arrow into her heart there blended a bitter sense of humiliation.

She seemed to be choking, and she raised her head and wrenched the pale blue ribbon from her throat, in order to breathe more freely.

"I believe I should rejoice if I should see him struck dead!" she muttered, turning without a word of explanation to her father, and hastening to the cottage.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHISPER OF THE WAVES.

On leaving the beach, Miss Vance went immediately to her own room.

"When father comes in, tell him that I have a headache, and don't wish to be disturbed," she said, curtly, to her maid, as she dismissed her from further attendance on her for the night.

She had said that she meant to retire immediately, but she did not do so. She placed herself instead on a low chair at the window, and gazed out upon the broad sweep of water above which the round moon drifted like a silver ship.

Her eyes and cheeks were glowing as if with the fire of fever, and her heart was beating tumultuously.

Never for an instant did her thoughts leave Ray Sylvane, and never for an instant did the terrible feeling of bitterness she entertained toward him diminish.

"Oh, that she could make him understand how little he was to her—how less than nothing, save for the contempt and hatred she had for him," her thoughts ran. "Oh, that she could make him understand how easily she could cast him out of her life!"

A burning desire to make him understand that fact took possession of her; a desire to show him that he had the power to disturb her life as little as a pebble cast into the ocean would move that great flood.

"That's what I'll do!" she exclaimed to herself at last, bringing her delicate hand down on the window-sill with a blow so fierce that it cruelly bruised the tender flesh. "I will marry some one else—the first eligible person who may ask me! Then Mr. Ray Sylvane will understand that I am not hard to console for the loss of himself!"

It was late into the night when she came to that conclusion, and the moon had gone down, leaving only the unsilvered darkness to envelop her; for she had not lighted her lamp.

So she arose, and threw herself, ready dressed as she was, upon her bed, but she did not sleep.

All night long, while the low winds moaned against her window, and the sullen waves moaned against the shore, she tossed restlessly, feeling a feverish exultation in the idea which had fastened upon her mind to show Ray Sylvane how easily she had cast him from her heart by an early marriage with some one else.

"He shall not think that I am grieving myself to death for him," she muttered over and over again; and it seemed such an easy thing to give her hand to some one else.

Who that some one else was to be, she never thought to inquire of herself; but she did not think with favor of any lover who had preceded Ray Sylvane as a claimant for her hand, there being none among the number whom she had looked upon with favor; so her ideas drifted in a vague way about some one whom she was yet to meet.

It seemed very much pleasanter to think of marrying some one whom she had never seen than any one whom she had known; for, of course, she could, in her mind, invest him with all necessary charms, and could not remember any jarring lack of congeniality, as she could with those who had been her suitors.

So, filled with feverish unrest, she tossed all night long, with the mournful lullaby of the wind and sea in her ears,

and when the dawn, cold and gray, came stealing into her room, she arose, with her face utterly colorless, and with her eyes heavy from the pain that was racking her head.

She bathed her throbbing temples, and combed out her long brown hair, and then she threw a light shawl over her shoulders, and tied a broad-brimmed hat over her flowing hair, which she left unbound because of the pain in her head.

"I will go out for a walk, and see the sun rise from the summit of Eagle's Crag: the air will refresh me," she muttered, as she turned and went from the room, gliding softly along the little hall, and passing noiselessly through the front door.

Eagle's Crag towered up tall and rugged a quarter of a mile in the distance, with the restless waves fretting at its base, and the fog curling in misty wreaths around it.

As Miss Vance walked hurriedly on, the cold, damp air blew refreshingly in her face, moistening her throbbing brow with minute particles of the salt spray, which was very pleasant to her in her feverish state, and which lightened the heavy pressure on her heart and brain.

The exhilarating ocean breeze caused a complete reaction to come to her, a feeling of buoyancy took possession of her. It seemed to her such an easy matter now to become the mistress of the situation over Ray Sylvane.

As she walked swiftly and lightly along, it seemed to be such a very easy matter to love and to marry some other suitor, and so convince him how very independent she was of him.

On she went, with the yellow sand grating pleasantly under her feet, and with the breeze blowing refreshingly on her face; and with the murmur of the waters coming musically to her ears.

She reached Eagle's Crag in a very short time, and began to ascend it, climbing nimbly from rock to rock that jutted out of its rugged side.

It was a long way up, and by the time she had reached the summit her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks were flushed with the exertion.

But how beautiful the scene was, and how well it repaid for the exertion it had cost her to see it, she thought, as she sank down to rest on the brow of the promontory, and ran her eyes over the far reaches of the landscape.

There was a flush as of wine where the line of sea and sky met in the east—the advance glory of the rising sun, which, blending with the shades of the mellowing dawn, was exceedingly beautiful.

From the base of the rocky crag she heard the whisper of the waves, but she could not see them, and in order to

do so, she rose to her feet and went to the edge of the great, projecting rock on which she had been sitting, and leaned over in a very dangerous way.

She had not noticed the sound of footsteps approaching lightly and rapidly behind her, and she was wholly unconscious of any one's proximity until a firm grasp was placed on her arm, and she was drawn forcibly back from the brow of the precipice over which she had been leaning, while at the same time a voice which had a strong German accent, exclaimed:

"You stand too near de brink; you will fall over."

Smothering the startled cry which had arisen to her lips, she glanced around to see a tall, slender man with a heavy mustache and greenish eyes, who was frowning and grimacing in a manner indicative of strong displeasure at her daring.

"Thank you," she said, catching her breath and releasing her arm from his grasp; "but I was in no danger; I am very sure-footed." And then she asked, staring curiously into his face:

"Where did you come from? I didn't know that any one was near me."

He shrugged his shoulders and knotted his forehead.

"It was a good thing for you dat I was near you, or you might be down there."

He made a quick motion with his hand so as to indicate the sea below, and then he added:

"I come up from de village to see de sun rise. It is a grand sight, de sunrise over de ocean. I have many a time watched it come up over de Rhine from de windows of my father's castle in Germany."

"How long have you been in America?" Miss Vance inquired, for lack of something more interesting to say.

"It is now six months since I landed in New York, and I have travel, travel ever since, seeing de beauties of de country," he responded, his greenish eyes never for an instant leaving her face.

"It is a beautiful country indeed, don't you think so?" she said, and he responded with another knitting of his brows and another shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, de country is well enough to look at—but de people"—an expressive grimace ended the sentence, and Miss Vance, catching its unflattering import, said, in a tone of pique:

"What objection do you find to the people? Surely they are good and hospitable."

"Oh, yes," he answered, always accompanying his words with shrugs and frowns. "Dey are good people in deir way, but deir way is not like our way. Dey have not de re-

spect in deir manners. Dey say to me, 'Mr. Von Hirschberg.' In Germany I am call Count Von Hirschberg. I am treated with respect in honor of my rank. Here dey have no rank, dey have no respect for rank. I don't like dat!"

He emphasized his disapproval with a great many shakes of his hemp-colored head, and with a great many contortions of his sharp features.

Miss Vance was young, and she was also filled with a great deal of false pride. In common with many youthful Americans, she had a profound respect for high-sounding titles, and the man announcing himself as the Count Von Hirschberg did not appear to her as a vain boaster, but as a person to be venerated almost because of his rank.

There came to her a humiliating sense that she was infinitely his inferior in social position, and a sort of disdain for herself and her country with its arbitrary rules of social and political equality rose up within her, and she felt that he, the high-born foreigner, must share in her feelings.

Her beauty seemed to her to be the only thing worth prizing in all her possessions, and she saw that he appreciated that, for his unabashed eyes as they rested upon her declared it.

He was not married: in his voluble communicativeness about himself, he soon told her that, and also that he was the only child of his titled father, who lived in a grand castle overlooking the Rhine.

While she stood there talking with him, and hearing the song of the sea, an idea that brought a conscious flush to her cheeks drifted through her mind. If that idea had been clothed in words, it would have been:

"Suppose he should fall in love with me, and offer to make me the Countess Von Hirschberg, and I should accept him, what would Ray Sylvane think, I wonder?"

The mere suggestion brought a thrill to her heart to think how chagrined he would be to find that the woman he had rejected instead of breaking her heart about him, had formed an alliance infinitely better.

The sun arose as if it were a ball of fire floating up from the sea, and it was an hour old in the new day when Miss Vance suddenly remembered that it was high time for her to turn her steps homeward.

"I must go," she said; "by the time I reach the cottage, breakfast will be ready, and father will be uneasy if he misses me."

"I will go with you, and take care of you—you have beauty which makes me your slave," the Count said, turn-

ing also, and accompanying her down the rocky side of the headland.

CHAPTER IX.

SHADOWS.

It was sunset.

All the western line of sea and sky was aglow with lingering tracks of crimson and gold, and the air was mellow with the influence of the coming twilight.

On the long veranda of the principal hotel of the village were two men. One of them was Gabriel McGregor, the proprietor of the house, a large man, leaning back against the wall in a strong chair, with his mind deeply buried in the contents of a huge volume of "Josephus," which he was holding on his broad chest as he read it.

The other person was also a large man, but he was much younger, and he had a restless look which was in striking contrast to the absorbed face of the naturally phlegmatic McGregor. He was walking up and down the length of the long veranda.

Every now and then his brown eyes swept a glance over the broad ocean, whose waters lapped the beach less than fifty yards away. Far away the sails of ships dotted the blue like the wings of white birds tinged with the gold of the sunset.

The young gentleman was Ray Sylvane, and he held in his right hand a small telescope, elegantly mounted in ebony and gold, but he had not once lifted it to his eye in the ten minutes during which he had been pacing up and down on the veranda.

Now, however, as he glanced seaward, something attracted his attention—something that appeared like a swimming bird in the distance, and he halted in his walk and raised the glass to his eye.

The strongly magnifying instrument revealed to him that the object was not a large bird, but was instead a small pleasure-boat in which two persons were seated—a man, who was rowing, and a woman who was steering.

He could only discern that much and no more, but somehow, the sight awakened an inexplicable interest in him, and he spoke to McGregor, near whom he had halted, and asked:

"Are those two in the boat yonder a pair of your villagers? I have noticed the same little craft for several evenings."

The absorbed host, not hearing his question, continued to read on, and he repeated it, and even called his name impatiently before he attracted his attention; and when he

had succeeded in causing the reader to turn his spectacled eyes from the page of the book to his face, he was compelled to reiterate the question before the abstracted McGregor took in his meaning.

Then he slowly reached out his pudgy hand for the telescope, and by dint of great care fitted his eye to the wrong end, and was some time in finding out the mistake, but at last succeeded in righting it; and then, after staring through it for fully five minutes, he restored it to the young man, and after emptying his mouth of a quantity of tobacco juice, he said, in his deep gutturals:

"I think they are Von Hirschberg, and a young lady who has taken a cottage near the headlands."

"Who is the young lady?" Ray Sylvane asked, feeling a growing interest in the matter which he could not have accounted for.

"I don't know her name," Mr. McGregor responded, evincing a determination to return immediately to his book. "I'm not acquainted with them."

Not acquainted with whom?" Ray asked impatiently; and Mr. McGregor, whose spectacles had already been turned toward the inviting page, grunted out abstractedly:

"The old man and her—her father, I reckon."

Ray Sylvane shrugged his shoulders, and resumed his walk.

He saw that it would be only a waste of time and patience to question his host any further, so he contented himself with staring at the little boat through the telescope, and with vague speculations in regard to its occupants.

Her father and her. The relationship suggested by the landlord brought forcibly to his mind the thought of Colonel Vance and his daughter, and a startling idea broke over him.

What if they were the occupants of the cottage near the headlands? They were somewhere on the sea-shore, he knew, but where, he did not know.

His heart began to beat tumultuously, as he walked up and down the veranda, staring at the little boat swimming like a bird on the shining sea in the distance.

Could it be that the parties in it were Kate Vance, proud, refined Kate Vance, and the bombastic foreigner who had occupied a seat at the same table with himself for the last week?

He could hardly recognize her association with such a man as being in the very slightest degree in accordance with his knowledge of her character.

"Von Hirschberg is ill-bred," he muttered, "she could not tolerate his society for five consecutive minutes."

The far-reaching glass was at his eye, and he noticed

that the little boat he was watching was now returning. It was rapidly skimming the water, growing every moment darker in the darkening twilight, and it was heading for the neighborhood of Eagle's Crag.

A sudden idea seized on the mind of Ray Sylvane, and he hastened to put it in execution.

He would saunter down the beach; he would be near enough to the boat when it landed to see who its occupants really were. He would set his mind at rest in regard to Kate Vance.

He stepped off the veranda and walked swiftly away over the brown sands in the gathering gloom, always keeping his eyes fixed on the shadowy-looking boat now drawing rapidly toward the shore.

He observed the point for which it was making, and he halted about twenty-five yards away, and waited for it to touch the land.

"If it is Kate—which I can't believe is possible—I will recognize her from this distance."

On came the little boat, nearer and nearer.

His heart began to throb, and his breath to come rapidly.

That graceful figure holding the rudder smote him with its familiar look.

The white prow touched the sand of the beach, and the figure arose and stepped lightly out, unassisted by the oarsman.

Ray Sylvane uttered a quick exclamation.

Surely nature had never gifted but one woman with that queenly grace! Surely, surely, it was Kate Vance.

He knew it even before her face was turned toward him in the dim light, as she bade adieu to her companion, who immediately struck the oars into the water, and went skimming away again.

Kate Vance did not linger on the beach: she turned away towards the little cottage, but before she reached it, Ray Sylvane's rapid steps had brought him up beside her, and as she turned toward him with a startled cry, every particle of color going out of her face, he said entreatingly, reaching out his hand and placing it on her arm:

"Kate, my darling, let me speak to you for at least five minutes."

CHAPTER X.

A REPULSE.

THE sudden appearance of her former lover there before her in the deepening dusk, was so unexpected to Miss

Vance that she only stared wide-eyed for an instant after he had said:

"Let me speak to you for at least five minutes."

Then a dark flush swept over her face, and she began to tremble.

She dragged her arm from his detaining hand, and said hoarsely:

"How dare you approach me, Ray Sylvane! Never presume to speak to me again! Ah, I could kill you, but that I have so much contempt for you!"

Quivering from head to foot with the storm of feeling that had been stirred within her by the sight of him, she turned to walk on to the cottage.

But he was not so easily shaken off. He walked on beside her, and persisted in speaking to her, for it seemed to him that he would die there in her regal presence unless he could disburden his heart by offering a truthful explanation of the cause, so far as he knew it, which had prevented his presence at that wedding feast.

"Hear me, Kate," he said, pleadingly. "You must hear me! I swear that my detention that evening was wholly unavoidable. Let me explain."

She swung suddenly around and halted before him, with her eyes flashing and her cheeks glowing.

"Can you explain the motive that prompted you to spend the hours of that evening, which was to have seen you married to me, in the society of another woman?"

For the first time in her life, an allusion to that humiliating fact had crossed the lips of Kate Vance. Yet, not a waking hour of her time had passed that she had not remembered it. As to who the woman was, she had speculated until her brain had ached with vague conjecture, but never one hint of it had fallen from her lips till now.

She put the question to Ray Sylvane, standing very near him, with her eyes flashing on his face, and she saw an abashed look come into it.

He had meant to have explained truthfully about the drugged water which had been given to him by Electra Dean, but the manner of her question had baffled him in the design; for he could not have explained to her the motive which had led him to turn his horse's head in the direction of Granny Dean's cottage that evening, any more than he could have explained it to himself at the time.

Embarrassment held him silent for the space of half a minute, during which Kate Vance had stood before him flushed and quivering. She broke the brief pause, and her low voice was hoarse and unsteady.

"Ray Sylvane, let me tell you something, and when I

do, it is, please understand, the very last thing I ever expect to say to you. Now hear me. Since I have come to know you, since I have come to see you as you are, I feel that I can never be sufficiently grateful to you for saving me the disgrace of being your wife."

Without waiting an instant for him to reply, she turned from him and went swiftly away toward the cottage, and he made no attempt to follow her.

He stood gazing after her until she disappeared in the leaden gloom which had by this time settled over sea and land, and a miserable realization had come to him that between him and her a great gulf was yawning which he could not bridge over.

He realized forcibly, for the first time, how useless, how worse than useless, would be any attempt on his part to explain his conduct on the tenth of April.

The consciousness came upon him that if he should tell the truth—the whole truth—in regard to his movements that evening, and should reveal the treachery he had received at the hands of Electra Dean, it would seem but a weak tissue of falsehood—a bit of sensational romance, to be rejected as the fabrication of his own brain.

"I am glad she didn't let me speak and explain," he muttered, lifting his hand to draw it in a tremulous way over his forehead, where a cold moisture had gathered; "she would not have believed me, and I could not have blamed her for it. The whole story seems incredulous almost to me."

He turned his back on the little cottage into which Kate had disappeared, and walked slowly and heavily over the sand toward his hotel.

Like golden blossoms on the sky, the stars were unfolding one by one, and the ocean, which was as smooth as a mirror, reflected them on its polished surface.

The low sound of the water lapping the shore was as soft as the murmur of the lazy night wind that fluttered against him as he walked on, with his head bowed on his breast.

He was thinking of Electra Dean as he had thought of her many, many times since the bright March morning when he had first beheld her dark, beautiful face framed in a crimson hood, and glowing with indignation at the touch of Miss Vance's whip.

"Who would ever have supposed that she would have taken such pains to revenge herself for the insult?" he muttered. "Who would have supposed that such overweening pride as I know Electra Dean possesses, could have been fostered in the little hut in that wild ravine? She is a strange creature; one scarcely knows how to deal with her."

Muttering thus to himself, he walked slowly on, with his forehead knotted in thought.

The consciousness had dawned upon him that Electra Dean, and she only, could possibly bridge over the gulf which lay between him and the woman he loved—the gulf which Electra Dean herself had called into existence.

“If she would go to Kate and would own the truth, explaining fully the treachery she practiced on me to prevent my presence at Colonel Vance’s on the evening of the tenth of April, and also the angry spite that led her to it, I think—I know, in fact, that Kate would credit the story, and it might possibly lead her to forgive me. I wonder if it would be possible to induce Electra Dean to make that confession?”

He went on, lost in perplexing thought, his mind running continually on the feeling of spite, and the thirst for vengeance, which he believed had alone actuated Electra Dean when she had given to him that drugged potion.

Never for an instant did the idea that she might have been driven to it by any other sentiment cross his mind. He had not the faintest suspicion that she entertained any partiality for himself. If he had done so, he would not have formed the purpose which, before he reached the hotel, settled on his mind, and which he determined to set himself immediately to perform.

That purpose was, to go to Electra Dean, and in some way, he had no idea what, to induce her to make peace between himself and Kate Vance.

“She can do it, and she only,” he muttered, as he stepped on the veranda of the hotel, “and somehow or other, I will find means to make her do it. To-morrow morning I will set out, on the first available boat that touches here, for the old ravine in Kentucky, and for Granny Dean’s cottage, and if I don’t make Electra serve as a witness in my favor, why then—I will know the reason of my failure—that’s all!”

But the reason that might come to him never suggested itself to his mind for an instant.

Ray Sylvane was an impulsive person who, having jumped at a resolution, was always very hasty in carrying it out; and so he acted in the present instance, and three days afterward he was registered at the old Red Star Hotel in the village of Wildwood.

After partaking lightly of the frugal breakfast, he arose from the table and sauntered out into the little yard in front of the building.

A man with very black eyes and hair, and a Hercules in proportions, was crossing the green plat at the time, and he and Ray Sylvane met face to face, and the young gen-

tleman took the opportunity to make an inquiry which had been in his mind ever since his arrival an hour before at the Red Star.

"Good-morning, Barry. By the bye, Barry, is old Granny Dean still living with her grand daughter in the ravine?"

The natural scowl on the dark, handsome face of the man deepened very perceptibly, and his fingers closed in a spasmodic grip over the bridle he held in his hand. He looked as if the question had irritated him, but he answered civilly, with his voice only a trifle more growling than usual:

"Yes, they live there yet."

He walked away across the grass plat as he spoke, and Ray Sylvane went on to the yard gate, through which he passed, and turned his steps in the direction of the picturesque ravine a half mile distant.

Notwithstanding the preoccupied state of his mind, and the mission on which he was bent, his eyes, always keen to perceive beauty, was attracted by the pleasing effect which the season had wrought by sprinkling bright flowers on the rugged hills between which he was passing, and by covering the great rocks with many shades of velvety moss.

But he was diverted from the contemplation of the inanimate features of the scene, by an object that was in harmony with them, and yet of an entirely different order of creation.

That object was the figure of a woman moving with a free, graceful step over the rocks fifty yards before him.

He instantly recognized her, and he quickened his pace, until he was so near her that the sound of his footsteps fell on her ear, causing her to look around.

As she did so, he called out:

"Wait, Miss Electra, I was going to see you. But I would rather talk to you here."

She instantly halted, and waited for him to come up to her, with her red lips compressed, and the rich color very deep on her dusky face, and the light very bright in her black eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

ANXIETY.

EVEN in the state of anxiety in which he was, and as much in love with another woman as he was, Ray Sylvane, poet and artist by nature, felt his heart stirred with admiration as he halted before Electra, where she stood in all her

rare beauty and her unstudied grace amid the mossy stones.

His feeling of bitterness toward her seemed to be borne away on the light winds that paused for an instant in their flight to caress the rings of jet black hair on her forehead, and his voice was very soft as he said:

"I want to have a conversation with you, Electra—you will let me call you Electra, won't you?" he broke off to ask, looking down from his superior height into her flushed face.

There was a slight tremulousness about her full red lips, when she unclosed them to utter a response, which she gave in one curt word:

"Yes."

He glanced around, and his eyes catching sight of a large flat rock, cushioned with velvety moss, he motioned toward it, saying:

"Let us sit there, and then we can talk comfortably."

She turned obediently, and seated herself upon it, and he dropped down on the space beside her.

Her hands crept together, and toyed nervously on her lap, and she looked down at them half shyly, half sullenly, while his brown eyes, always evincing the admiration her picturesque beauty awakened within him, were fixed upon her face.

"You are a wonderfully handsome girl, Electra," he said, breaking the brief silence which had come between them, and speaking as if the assertion had been wholly involuntary. "It is hard to believe that such a fair casket could enshrine a malicious spirit. I don't believe it does; I believe that your heart is good."

The tribute of praise which she could not but feel was sincerely offered, pleased her, evidently, for a flash went over her face, that was as bright in its way as was the stray sunbeam that glittered on the dusky locks of her uncovered head; but she did not speak, nor did she raise her eyes from their contemplation of her interlacing fingers.

Ray Sylvane, loving beauty as he did for its very perfection, could not but feel all his soul turn in kindness toward this girl.

A memory of the great wrong she had done him was present with him as he sat there on the mossy rock beside her, but as certainly there was no thought of bitterness connected with it.

Her beauty had won his forgiveness for the injury she had done him, and it had won also trust in her.

"Electra," he said, placing his hand softly, and as a brother might have done, on one of her own, not noticing that it trembled like a frightened bird in his clasp, "Elec-

tra, in the blindness of your anger toward somebody else, and in order to spite somebody else, you did me a great wrong once—a wrong that has caused me much sorrow. I have come to ask you to undo it—for my sake. You will, won't you?"

He asked the question softly, tenderly, never doubting, in the spell which her beauty had wrought over him, but that she would acquiesce. His heart went out in kindness toward her, and he felt that hers came to him fraught only with the same feeling. Therefore, he did not doubt but that she would grant his petition.

The fringed lids were lifted suddenly from the black eyes, and they looked straight into his own as she asked sharply:

"What do you want me to do?"

More warmly he clasped in his own the little brown hand, and he bent his face nearer over hers, as he answered:

"I want you to see Miss Vance, and explain to her just why it was that I was not at Silver Bend on the tenth of April. She would not believe me, but she would believe you, and she would forgive and trust me again. I know you will do that for me, because I want you to do it, and because it is right and just for you to do it."

He saw the quick fire that leaped into her black eyes; he saw the warm rich glow struck from her face, and then her hand was snatched from him, and she sprang to her feet, with her graceful form trembling like an aspen leaf.

"Explain to her—I would see her dead first!" she cried, hoarsely. "I saved you from her, and you want me to give you back to her, and I tell you I would see *you* dead first! I would kill you with my own hands, and then kill myself afterward, because I had done it, rather than I would give you to her! And I tell you, and I swear it before all the holy angels, that you shall never marry Kate Vance! If she had never struck me that blow with her whip, still you should not marry her if I had strength to prevent it! I will peril my life, and if need be, I will lose it, to save you from her. What would life be to me but a hell if I knew you as the husband of Kate Vance, if I knew that all your kind words and smiles were given to her? No, sir, I will not undo the mischief I have done, but I will, instead, keep you and Kate Vance apart as long as I live, so help me God!"

Her voice at times had choked in her throat, and then it had risen almost to a shriek. She was fairly beside herself, and the strength of her violent passion struck Ray Sylvane dumb with wonder.

Not until she had ceased speaking, and had suddenly turned from him, disappearing around a curve in the

ravine, and he was left to collect his scattered thoughts, did he come to comprehend the meaning which had been conveyed through her violent words.

But with the swiftness and vividness of a flash of lightning, it struck his understanding.

Electra Dean loved him!

It was such an unexpected revelation that at first he could only wonder at it; but as he sat there thinking of it, with the flower-starred hills rising around him, and with the brook purling at his feet, and the birds warbling over his head, there came to be something pleasing in the thought. It awakened little warm thrills in his heart to recall her to his mind in all the glow of her wild, picturesque beauty, when she had made that passionate avowal.

"Poor child!" he muttered, lying back on the mossy stone with his eyes closed, and with the light wind toying with his brown hair, "I am sorry, very sorry, that she should have taken such a violent fancy to me. I am sure I never tried to win it from her."

In saying that he had not tried to win her fancy, he had spoken truthfully; but when he told himself that he "was sorry, very sorry, that she had taken a fancy to him," he had testified falsely to his own soul, and his heart, that was thrilling with an undeniably sweet consciousness, bore witness to the perjury.

Ray Sylvane remained there in the ravine, lying on the mossy stones, with the songs of the wild-birds in his ears, the fragrance of the wild flowers in his nostrils, the bit of clear blue sky overhead in his eyes, and the memory of Electra Dean in his mind.

He would have been glad if she had not left him so abruptly, he thought. She had not given him time to explain the situation to her, or he could have made it plainly evident to her that he and she could never be anything to each other save the best of friends—he would like to be a sort of a brother to her; he would like to educate her, to advance her in life. It was such a pity that she should waste all her glorious beauty there in that lonesome hollow. He would see her again, and make her understand that if she would do him the great favor he asked of her, then he would adopt her as a sister, and would educate her.

His thoughts ran on in this strain for more than an hour, and when at last he arose and turned his face toward the village again, he muttered:

"I will remain for a while at the Red Star, and by seeing Electra from time to time, and by making her understand how impossible it is for her and I ever to be anything to each other except good friends, I believe I can so work upon her better nature that she will bring peace be-

tween Kate and me when she and her father return to Silver Bend. It will only be three months until they return home, and there is no telling what great changes may be wrought in that time. At any rate, I think I can work a revolution in the sensitive nature of Electra Dean, if time and patience are spared me."

CHAPTER XII.

A THREAT.

THE golden morning dragged itself into the golden afternoon, which in its turn crept into the gray twilight, and the twilight passed into night.

In the deep ravine the shadows had gathered first, and marched slowly along toward Granny Dean's cottage by the music of a night bird's sleepy song.

Something else was going toward Granny Dean's cottage also, something that looked like a darker shadow amid shadows.

But it was instead a very substantial body, and it belonged to Barry Tempest, the hostler and man of general help at the Red Star.

He was moving with long rapid strides over the rocks that clattered under his heavy tread, and he was making his way straight to the cottage of Granny Dean.

So moving steadily and swiftly on, he reached it in a few minutes.

The cabin door was closed, for the old woman objected to the night air as being injurious to her rheumatic limbs, but Electra was sitting on the step, knitting by the faint starlight.

She looked up, but did not rise as Barry Tempest approached, nor did she speak, until he had first gruffly saluted her by name.

"Electra."

"Good evening, Barry," she responded sullenly, and there was in her tone a decided indication that her company was not a very agreeable interruption of her solitude.

He dropped heavily down on the step beside her, and said:

"You don't seem glad to see me. What's the matter?"

"I'm as glad to see you as I ever am," she responded, and it was well, perhaps, that the faint radiance of the stars did not permit him to see the disdainful curl of her red lip as she made the assertion.

"That may be easy enough, because you are never glad to see *me*," he retorted, with a strong emphasis on the last personal pronoun, which caused her to glance at him with

a keen scrutiny, as if she wanted to read in his dark face the meaning hinted at in his gruff tones. But she said with an additional curl of her red lip, which again he did not see.

"You may think as you please about that. I don't intend to contradict you. Because I don't care what you think about anything, I'd as lief you believed one way as another."

"And you don't care, may be, that I love you, and that I intend to marry you," he retorted angrily.

She tossed her head until its short black curls dropped low on her forehead, and uttered a short, defiant laugh:

"I don't care that you love me at all; you may do as you please about that. But as for marrying you—why, I shall do about that as *I* please; and I shall certainly *not* marry you."

"You won't, hey?" he responded, with an unmistakable threat conveyed in his angry tones. "In that game there'll be two against one, and the two will be apt to win the fight. You might beat one, but you can't beat your gran'mother and me together."

"You think not," she said, her clear, low voice more defiant than before. "Try it, both of you, and see!"

"Look here, 'Lec, I don't intend to be fooled with, and I want you to know it. I hain't loved you all these years, and I hain't looked forward to marrying you all the time to be balked now. I swear I hain't. You was quiet enough about it until here lately. Something's come over you, I don't know what, to set you against me; but I intend to find out what it is, and I intend to tear it away, whatever it is; and I swear to that, too!"

There was something positively fearful in the fierceness of his passion as he said that in tones that sounded like a succession of angry growls, but it did not seem to make any impression on Electra Dean further than to arouse a stronger spirit of defiance within her.

"I never agreed to marry you," she said, contemptuously. "I didn't give it a thought. You talked to grandmother, and grandmother talked to you. And I left you both to talk, but all the time I knew you were counting on what never would happen. I knew that I would never be your wife. Your wife indeed!"—she seemed, in her overweening contempt, to spit the words between her small teeth—"why, I would rather die!"

All day long there had been rankling, as it were, in his mind an unreasonable and most unaccountable feeling of jealousy toward Ray Sylvane. It had been awakened wholly by the young gentleman's inquiry as to whether Granny Dean and her granddaughter still lived in the cot-

tage in the ravine; and by his immediately setting out toward it, and by his protracted absence.

It was that jealousy which prompted his next question:

"You'd like to marry a gentleman like Mr. Sylvane, I suppose?"

She shrank a little, as the hoarse, suppressed tones propounded the query, but she answered disdainfully:

"I certainly don't want to marry a gentleman like Barry Tempest."

He made no response for a minute or so, but she heard his heavy breathing as he sat there on the step beside her. When he spoke at last he accompanied his words with fierce movements of his large head, which seemed to give a dangerous emphasis to them.

"There is one thing that is very certain, and that is that something has made a change in you toward me. You've always been civil enough before, and I intend to find out what it is that has set you against me. And when I *do* find out what it is, it won't stand between us long, I swear it won't!"

There was something ferocious about the man, and about his growling voice, as he uttered the threat which would have intimidated a woman of the least nervous sensibility. But Electra Dean was a stranger to those weak fears that are so apt to beset the more fortune-favored of her sex, whose follies seem to be as much heightened by a fashionable education, as their better qualities are benefited. She listened to his threat with angry disdain.

"Bah!" she said contemptuously, rattling the knitting needles which she had all this time been diligently plying, noisily together, "You talk like a fool. Everything sets me against you! You set me against yourself!"

"You may make as light of it as you please," he said, angrily, rising to his feet, while the starlight revealed the magnificent proportions of his herculean frame as he drew it up to its fullest height, "but I know that something's been at work with you to undermine me, and I intend to find out what it is. I'm keener than you think I am; I ain't half the fool you take me for, and what I see, I see; and what I know, I know; and I saw Ray Sylvane start for this house this morning, and I know that you saw him. But what I *don't* know is, what a grand gentleman like him has got to do with a poor girl like you. That's what I mean to find out, though, as sure as my name's Barry Tempest!"

He wheeled on his heel as he spoke, and strode heavily away in the dim light; and as he disappeared from her sight in the blackness of the ravine, the sound of his growling voice came faintly to her as he muttered to himself;

but what those muttered words were she did not hear; yet if she had done so they would have awakened more than a passing interest in her, for they related to Ray Sylvane, and they were:

“I’ll watch him. I’ll track him like a blood-hound, and if I find that he’s at the bottom of this, that he’s tampering with her to set her against me, then, by the Lord, I’ll make him suffer for it! I will if I’m hung for it the next hour! If he was the king on his throne he shouldn’t come between me and ’Lec, and he had better not try; I swear he had better not try!”

CHAPTER XIII.

A DANGEROUS MEETING.

THE days glided by, until one week had passed, and during that time Ray Sylvane had remained a guest at the Red Star.

He had not seen Electra Dean since the morning he had held that stormy interview with her in the ravine, during which she had been betrayed into revealing the state of her heart to him. Yet she had never been wholly absent from his mind since. He was young, and he was also of a sensitive, poetic nature, and the knowledge that she had given her love unsought to him, awoke with him a romantic interest in her, and sent little warm thrills through his heart, which were not awakened, as they usually are, by the stirring wings of nestling love, but by its base counterfeit, which is gratified vanity.

Yet in all those seven days, during which she had been so constantly present with him in his dreamings, he had not sought to see her; he felt that it would be wrong to do so, unless it was to show her the exact footing on which they stood toward each other, to make her understand how utterly impossible it was that they could ever be anything to each other but real good friends.

“When she comes to understand that, as I intend she shall do when I see her again, she will be willing to explain to Kate the part she took in keeping me from Silver Bend on the evening of the tenth of April.”

He told himself that many times during the week that had passed since he had seen her, but he made no effort to put his words into effect. Why he did not he could not have told. He only knew that he shrank from doing so, and as he did, he never once turned his steps toward the little cabin in the ravine.

“We will meet soon enough,” he muttered, “and when we do I will have a long sensible talk with her. I will leave Chance to guide me.”

So he loitered about the banks of the little creek, angling for the silver perch which were so ready to bite at his hook, usually, or strolling through the leafy woods, with his gun on his shoulder, hunting the squirrels and the birds which abounded in them.

But no matter in what course he bent his steps, the keen eyes of Barry Tempest marked it, and several times, when he had been at leisure to do so, he had followed him at a distance, in order to make sure that he really was led abroad by a desire to fish or hunt, and not by the wish to see Electra Dean.

Barry Tempest was madly jealous of him, and yet he could not have given any reason for the feeling, which had come instinctively rather than from any reasonable cause, seeing that he had none beyond the fact that Ray Sylvane had asked him, on the first day of his arrival there, about old Granny Dean and Electra, and on being informed that they still resided in the ravine, had turned his steps immediately in that direction.

That circumstance, combined with Electra's disdain of himself that same evening, had awakened Barry Tempest's suspicions and jealousy against Ray Sylvane, and led to his determination to watch him secretly, in order to learn if his dark conjectures were well founded.

He was tortured by uncertainty, because his duties at the Red Star, and the exactions of his employer there, did not permit him to keep as close a watch over the movements of his suspected rival as he wished; and several times while Ray Sylvane was reclining on the river bank, dreamily watching his cork floating on the shining water, Barry Tempest was working in the stables, and imagining the young gentleman holding a lover's talk with Electra in the ravine.

It was the morning of the seventh day since Ray Sylvane's arrival at the Red Star, and since his interview with Electra, that he slung his gun over his shoulder, and set out on a bird-hunt, taking a route which he had not been before.

It was a beautiful morning; the sunlight dropped upon him through the branches of the trees like atoms of transparent gold, as he walked under them, forgetting that he was on the quest of birds, and happily leaving the innocents unmolested, while he softly whistled the air of "Love's Young Dream."

He was thinking, as usual, of Electra Dean, and his heart was thrilling with that sense of gratified vanity which the memory of her unsought love for himself never failed to awaken, when he suddenly caught sight of a bit

of scarlet through the interstices of the leaves before him.

Was it the flitting wing of a red bird?

The idea suggested itself to his mind only to be discarded immediately, for the object he had caught a passing glimpse of was very much larger than a bird.

The whistled air died instantly on his lips, and shifting his gun from one shoulder to the other, he went forward, quickening his steps, and going in the direction in which he had caught a momentary sight of that red object.

He saw it again; he saw it clearly now with no obstruction of distance nor of foliage.

It was a red hood covering the head of a woman who was kneeling on the ground with her back to him, and digging up a small root with an old knife.

Ray Sylvane's heart gave a quick leap as he saw her.

Although her face was turned away from him, he recognized that kneeling figure with its picturesque garb and its unstudied grace.

It could belong to but one person, and going softly up to her, he called her name:

"Electra."

She looked up with a start, uttering a quick exclamation, and springing to her feet in the surprise of his unexpected presence.

"Where did you come from? What brought you here?" she said incoherently, with the rich color coming and going on her face, and even darkening her dusky throat under the shadow of the red hood.

With his head a little aslant in the manner usual to him, and with his brown eyes looking steadily down into the bright, black orbs uplifted to him, he answered:

"I came from the Red Star, and as to what brought me here, I think *you* did; because all the time I was coming you seemed to be present with me—to be drawing me to you, nearer and nearer at every step. And now that I am here, I want to have a long talk with you. Let us sit here on this fallen tree."

He turned as he spoke, and seated himself on the trunk of a great oak that had been blasted by the lightning, and had been wrenched up by the winds; and she mechanically placed herself beside him, keeping her face averted, however, and keeping the heavily fringed lids lowered over her eyes.

All the week he had been thinking about her—had been filled with an undefinable desire to see her; all the week he had been turning over in his mind what he should say to her when he should see her. But for all that, no words came to his lips now as he sat beside her so close that he

could hear her quick breathing in the breaks of a bird's song that fell in a gush of melody from a tree near by.

He had set himself to the performance of a stern duty, but as he sat there looking into the dark beauty of her averted face, for the first time the realization came to him that he had set a hard task before himself.

The wild, sweet song of the bird was not the only sound that came unheeded to them as they sat on the fallen oak, with that awkward silence between them. There was the fall of heavy feet muffled on the soft ground, but coming nearer and nearer to them.

They heard those sounds as they heard the notes of the birds--without noticing them--without being conscious, indeed, that they were hearing them.

So a minute or so passed.

Electra sat with her eyes downcast and her face averted, picking nervously at the rough bark of the log between them, and he sat gazing dreamily at her.

They might have seen the owner of the coming feet at one instant, if they had thrown a backward glance over their shoulders for he suddenly came in sight of them in a clear space in the woods not ten yards behind them.

But they did not look around, so they were unconscious of the fact that the gleaming eyes of Barry Tempest were fixed upon them, and that rifts of white banded his swarthy face here and there, and that his large teeth shone between his unsteady lips, like those of a ferocious beast.

He tried to creep nearer to them, in order to hear what they might say, but the sharp cracking of a dry twig under his feet so decidedly claimed the attention of the two sitting there on the fallen tree, that they both started involuntarily to their feet.

In another instant, with the vivid color burning like fire on her face, Electra darted away, disappearing in the thick growth of young saplings, and leaving the two men standing and regarding each other very much like two incensed wild animals.

CHAPTER XIV.

JEALOUSY.

RAY SYLVANE was vexed at the interruption which had brought his interview with Electra to such an abrupt and unsatisfactory end, and he showed it in the dark frown which he bent on Barry Tempest.

Tempest, on his part, was almost blind with jealousy and wrath, and there were ugly spots on his face mottling it with purple, and a dangerous gleam in his black eyes. His

arms were hanging at his side, and his fingers worked nervously on the palms of his hands.

"I want to speak to you," he said, his voice sounding like an unsteady growl, while he accompanied his words with slight movements of his head which were ominous of the dangerous capabilities within him—"I want to speak to you about her."

A quick turn of his eyes, and a slight gesture in the direction where Electra had disappeared, plainly indicated the person he had alluded to, and Ray Sylvane understood him.

"If you have anything to say to me, say it in as few words as possible," he responded haughtily, aroused to something of anger by the menacing tone and appearance of the man.

"I *will* say it in a few words," Tempest responded, the ugly spots growing darker on his face. "What I want to know is what you mean by that girl? Do you mean fair and square by her? Do you mean to marry her?"

Never in his life had Ray Sylvane been so taken aback, as it were, as he was by that question. He took a few uneasy steps, and cast a glance around like one who is hopelessly puzzled, and who vainly seeks a solution to some unexpected problem.

It was only a momentary bewilderment, and then his eyes, piercing and disdainful, met the menacing gaze of his questioner unflinchingly.

"I would like to know, my friend, by what right you presume to call me to account for anything I may do, or for any intention I may harbor! Until I am brought to acknowledge that right I shall certainly not trouble myself to enter into any explanation to you."

The withering contempt, conveyed more in his voice than in his words, had no effect upon Barry Tempest, who had been accustomed to disdainfully give commands in his manhood, just as he had been accustomed to blows in his friendless childhood, and who had received them as his natural meed, as quietly as Ray Sylvane received testimonials of respect. So he responded to the question, rather than to the manner of its delivery.

"You want to know what right I've got to ask you what you mean by running after Electra Dean, do you? I'll tell you what right I've got. I've got the right of being her best friend; the right of being the man that always looked for'rud to marrying her. If it ain't my right to watch over her, I intend to make it my right. The likes of you never mean honest by the likes of her. But I tell you, Mr. Ray Sylvane, that if any harm comes to her

through you, I'll kill you for it. I will, as sure as God's in Heaven."

His fingers were clinched now upon his palms, and the words of his threat came in a lower, hoarser growl than his voice had taken before, and Ray Sylvane's head was more haughtily lifted as he heard it.

A wave of resentment at the impertinence of this man whom he disdained, swelled within him. But it was only momentary, for it swiftly subsided before the consciousness that the offender very evidently loved Electra Dean, and was naturally jealous and suspicious of him. He remembered what a vast distance in their social positions lay between himself and Electra Dean, and that naturally enough the most innocent attentions on his part to her might be misconstrued, especially by her betrothed lover—as the words of Barry Tempest had led him to believe he was. So the resentment dying out in him gave place to a sort of contemptuous pity.

He spoke civilly.

"I have no evil intentions toward the girl, you may rest assured of that; and I have no idea of interfering with any claim you may have upon her."

So saying, he turned on his heel and walked away, and Barry Tempest, after standing for a minute staring sullenly after him, went away also, but in an opposite direction.

His course led through the woods, and down the slope to the little cabin of old Granny Dean.

"I'll let her know that he don't mean to marry her, whatever else he may mean," he muttered, striding determinedly on. "If she thinks she can throw me down, and let him walk over me like, she's mightily mistaken, and I mean to let her know it. If he's the cause of her putting on airs with me, I mean to find it out before I sleep to-night; and it won't be good for him if he comes between her and me. I'll swear it won't!"

So muttering to himself, he went down the rocky and rather steep declivity, and appeared before Granny Dean as she sat sunning herself in front of the cabin door on a wooden stool.

She looked up, exclaiming in her quavering voice:

"Lord bless you, Barry, you come like a sperit! I wasn't thinkin' about you bein' a-near."

"I don't come like a very good sperit neither, granny," he responded, glancing around, and into the open door of the cabin, as if in quest of some one. "Where's 'Lec?"

"I don't know," the old woman responded, resting her shriveled chin on the head of the cane she held between her knees. "I can't keep up with 'Lec. She said this

mornin' that she was goin' out to dig some yellow root, and may be that's what took her away. She's be'n gone a good-ish bit, now."

Barry Tempest dropped down on a large flat rock at his feet, and said sullenly:

"What she went to find, I think, was in the shape of a young man that she'd a plagued sight better be letting alone!"

"What young man?" the old woman asked sharply, turning her head, and peering at him with her sharp, bright eyes, from under her shaggy brows. "She don't know no young man except you."

"She don't!" he ejaculated with angry contempt, jerking his huge frame so as to bring a great many of its strong muscles into motion. "I happen to know better than that, granny. I saw her talkin' to one in the woods, not a half hour ago."

"Who was it?" the old woman asked, and there was more of curiosity than anything else evinced by her quavering tones. "I never heerd her say that she knowed any young man."

"And you won't be apt to hear her say so," he responded, speaking again with that angry contempt, and accompanying his words with that jerking motion of his body. "'Tain't likely that she'll tell you or anybody else that she's in the habit of meeting Mr. Ray Sylvane out in the woods."

At the mention of the young gentleman's name the old woman uttered a gurgling laugh.

"And I'll be bound 'Lec never told you the trick she played on him the night he was a-goin' to be married to Kate Vance," she said.

"What trick?" Tempest asked surlily, but evidently vividly interested.

"Why, givin' him a good dose of my sleepin' drops that evenin'," she responded, chuckling. "It kept him a sleepin' fast enough, with his head on that very rock you're a-sittin' on, while Miss Kate and all the grand folks at Silver Bend was a-waitin' fur him in their weddin' finery."

"What made her do that?" he asked, sharply. "Did she think she could get him for herself?"

"She done it because that proud jade at Silver Bend hit her with her ridin' whip like she had been a dog. 'Lec Dean's got her father's blood in her, and she wa'n't goin' to take it. She set herself to pay Kate Vance back, and she done it that evenin'. I'll be bound, it hurt her just as bad for her beau not to come to marry her after she had fixed for it, and had all the rich people there, as the cut of her whip hurt 'Lec. They ain't married yet, and they won't be in a hurry if 'Lec can help it."

A queer look of perplexity was blending with the sullen anger which had been before on the dark, handsome face of Barry Tempest.

The question uppermost in his mind was, whether it was spite toward Miss Vance or love for Ray Sylvane which had actuated her to prevent the marriage.

At that moment the sound of dry twigs breaking under a succession of light footsteps fell on his ear, and as he looked in the direction from whence the sounds proceeded, he saw Electra coming slowly up the ravine, with her arms full of roots and vines.

He arose and went hurriedly to meet her, and placing his hand heavily on her shoulder, he said, while he pointed toward a fallen tree a few paces away, and beyond the reach of Granny Dean's shrewd eyes:

"Sit there with me. Before God, I mean to come to an understanding with you before I sleep to-night!"

CHAPTER XV.

WARNING.

ELECTRA cast a defiant look into the dark face of Barry Tempest, as if she had an idea of refusing him the interview he demanded; but the resolute expression his features wore may have influenced her to grant it, for she seated herself on the fallen tree he had indicated, and he placed himself beside her.

Her forehead was drawn into a rebellious frown, and she kept her eyes turned persistently away from him.

"I want to know what you are to Ray Sylvane, or what he is to you, that you should meet him out in the woods, as you did this morning?" Tempest said, plunging recklessly and angrily into the heart of the subject he meant to discuss with her, and speaking in a tone of surly command that was exasperating to a person of her quick, fiery temper.

The conscious color which had been on her face when she had caught sight of him sitting before the cabin door, deepened into a vivid red. She lifted and turned her head, sending a flashing glance upon him from her bright black eyes.

"It is none of your business what anybody is to me," she retorted, with a slight quiver of defiance running over her. "And now I tell you to attend to your own affairs, and leave me to manage mine. I don't want anything to do with *you*, Barry Tempest, and I don't want you to ever speak to me again."

She was in a violent passion, as was evinced by her quivering form, her flushed face, and her glittering eyes.

She made a movement to rise to her feet, but Barry Tempest's strong hand fell heavily on her arm, forcibly detaining her.

"You ain't a-goin' to stir from here until I come to an understanding with you," he said, fiercely. "And you might as well make yourself contented. I've come to say something to you, and I'm goin' to say it, and you're goin' to hear it, too."

All the opposition that her untamed nature was capable of was expressed in her face as she sat there looking at him with her head thrown back, and her arm in his grasp.

"When you put on such high airs with me Thursday night, I knew that there was something at the bottom of it, and I made up my mind that I was goin' to find out what it was, and I *have* found out! It's Ray Sylvane, the fine gentleman that I found you sitting beside in the woods a while ago! Are you such a fool, 'Lec Dean, as to believe any of his soft talk? Are you such a fool as not to know that the likes of him look upon the likes of you as so much dirt under their feet? Do you suppose that he would marry you? No, he would see you hanged and quartered first! And if you think anything else you're a fool. I love you, and love you honestly, and am willing any day, or hour, or minute that you may name to marry you; but I ain't willin' to let you knock me down and trample on me because you took a fancy to Ray Sylvane, and what's more, I won't stand to have you do it, nor to have him do it, neither; and so I tell you, and so I'll tell him!"

He was working himself, if possible, into a greater passion than he had been in at first, and his voice trembled into indistinctness, and his fingers tightened in their grip on her arm until she almost cried out with the pain. But she did not cry out; she would, in the stubborn pride of her untutored nature, have died, rather than utter any sound to indicate that he had the power to cause her any suffering.

She set her teeth hard together, and drew her breath quiveringly through her distended nostrils.

His taunts had aroused the evil in her nature a great deal more than his threats had awakened her fears, and in the recklessness of her mood she defied him.

"If I choose to see——" she hesitated in her sentence, and a suggestive play of her features for an instant did not escape his observation—then she went on, commencing the sentence over:

"If I choose to see any one a thousand times a day, it is none of your business! It is none of your business who I fancy so long as I don't fancy *you*, and you may stake your life that I don't do that! I hate you, Barry Tempest

—I hate you! I sha'n't knock you down and trample on you, sha'n't I? Bah, I could spit on you!"

Barry Tempest had been accustomed all his life to contemptuous treatment, and he had from habit learned to endure it, indeed, he scarcely noticed it—but not from her could he take it—and not from Ray Sylvane after that conversation with her; it would hereafter be dangerous for Ray Sylvane to cross his path, and Electra Dean came to understand that fact when he sprang to his feet trembling with the passion that is so terrible to see in a strong man.

"I came here this morning to warn you against Ray Sylvane, and now I tell you that you had better warn him against *me*. You have just the same as knocked me down, and trampled on me, and spit on me for his sake, for I know he's at the bottom of it, and as sure as you live I'll take it out of him if he crosses me again! You'd better give him up, 'Lec Dean! For his sake, as well as your own, you'd better give him up! If you wasn't nothin' to me, I'd warn you against him, you bein' the girl that you are, and he bein' the man that he is, for the 'Man in the Moon' would marry you jest as soon as Ray Sylvane would. But when a man has loved a girl, and has looked forrard to marryin' her as long as I have you, then he'd tear the heart out of the man that comes between him and that girl, if he was hung for it the next minute. May be he'd be glad of the halter that put him out of the world and out of his misery."

His harsh, fierce tones had gradually softened, until at the end there came a break in them that was touching to hear, it evinced such a world of pain. But it did not touch Electra Dean. She was so thoroughly incensed against him that she could almost have slain him where he stood, in his grand, rugged beauty, before her.

Every word he had spoken; every bitter truth which he had uttered, and which had struck upon the tender spot of her infatuation for high-born Ray Sylvane, had maddened her against him.

She sprang to her feet, letting the roots and vines, which she had been unconsciously holding all this time in her arms, fall to the ground, and said, with the slender brown fingers working nervously together, and with her breast heaving stormily, and with her eyes flashing with defiance:

"If you think I am afraid of you, either for myself or for anybody else, you are very much mistaken, Barry Tempest, great coward and ruffian that you are!"

She turned her back upon him, and walked away toward the cabin, but Tempest strode after her, and grasping her

shoulder forced her to face him. And never before had she looked into a countenance so inflamed with passion.

His face was deathly pale, except for the purple spots that appeared here and there upon it, and his eyes had the glassy look of a madman's.

"If I kill him, you will have yourself to blame for it! And I would kill him just as soon as I would kill a rattlesnake that had come between you and me!"

Without a word in reply, she wrenched her shoulder from his grasp and went away toward the cabin, not looking back once, but hearing the sound of his heavy feet as he moved down the rocky ravine echoing clearly on the morning air.

"'Lec Barry was sayin' somethin' about you and Ray Sylvane," Granny Dean said sharply, as the girl approached—"what was it?"

"I don't know," Electra answered crisply. "Barry Tempest is always saying something that has no sense in it."

She passed into the house and flung herself on a low stool, and bent her flushed and aching forehead over on her knees.

There was a feeling of oppression about her heart which she could not account for, and which gave her a feeling of misery and apprehension that she had been a stranger to before.

She did not know that it was the effect of the reaction of her over-strained nerves. Indeed, it is doubtful if she knew that her system was furnished with any such delicate little chords. She only knew that she felt utterly wretched, and that the shadow of some impending calamity seemed to be closing around her and suffocating her.

For some time, as she sat there with her forehead bent over on her knee, the nature of that miserable foreboding did not take shape in her mind. But as her thoughts kept running continually on Ray Sylvane and Barry Tempest the horrible conviction came to her that Barry Tempest would attempt to carry out his threat—that Ray Sylvane was in terrible danger from his hands.

Electra Dean sprung to her feet.

"I must warn him!" she muttered. "I must warn him against Barry Tempest!"

She flitted out through the back door of the cabin, and passed nimbly as a squirrel up the steep hill-side and away toward the village, to see and warn Ray Sylvane of the dire danger that she felt strangely convinced threatened his life.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING PARAGRAPH.

ELECTRA DEAN walked on with unflagging swiftness over the hill and through the green woodlands.

When she reached a point a half mile away from the cabin in the ravine, she came in sight of the little village whose dozen or so of whitewashed houses nestled in the green of the river valley.

The picturesque river, with its fringe of swamp willows, ran in front of it, with its waters glistening and sparkling in the bright sunlight, like a broad belt studded with diamonds.

As she halted for an instant on the brow of the gentle eminence overlooking the clear landscape, her sweeping glance caught sight of a solitary figure wandering slowly along the green bank of the stream.

She was not so far away but that she could recognize that figure.

There was no other like it in the village—no other that had the lordly and yet careless bearing that characterized that figure.

She instantly recognized it as belonging to Ray Sylvane, and after a moment of irresolution, she started on again, her nimble feet descending the hill with the free grace of a deer's movements, and skirting the village, she made her way toward him where he walked slowly along lost in reverie.

He did not hear her light steps, nor did he know that she was near him until she spoke to him, calling his name abruptly:

"Mr. Sylvane."

He turned with a start, and saw her standing where she halted less than two yards behind him.

He advanced toward her, holding out his hand.

"I was thinking of you," he said, quietly. "I am glad you are here; I want to talk to you."

Her presence did not surprise him—it seemed, somehow, the most natural thing in the world that his intense thought of her should have evoked her presence.

She did not take his hand, but she toyed nervously with the folds of her apron, and her face was flushed and knotted with embarrassment; and, noticing it, his hand fell at his side, and he stood before her with his brown eyes fixed inquiringly upon her.

Now that she was face to face with him, it seemed a hard matter to say what she had come there to tell him; so she spoke rather incoherently, avoiding his eyes and glancing helplessly up the shining river.

"Mr. Sylvane—I wanted to—— You had better take care of Barry Tempest. He may do you harm."

"Why should Barry Tempest do me harm?" he asked, bending a trifle nearer to her, and still looking curiously down into her face.

He knew why when he put the question to her as well as he did after she had responded to it with sudden, reckless candor:

"He wants to marry me, and he thinks it is on your account that I won't have him; so—so——"

She floundered helplessly in her speech, and tears rose into her eyes, over which the heavily fringed lids quivered.

"I know that he is jealous of me," Ray Sylvane said, speaking softly, deprecatingly. "I am sorry for it. He has no reason to be, you know. He has mistaken my feelings toward you. He thinks that I regard you as a lover; he doesn't understand the sort of brotherly feeling I have for you."

He was glad of the opportunity of telling her that. It was what he had been thinking of telling her while he had been wandering alone there on the river bank.

He saw the rich color coming and going on her face, and he saw the tears seem to be suddenly dried in her eyes, and he went on impetuously:

"Let us understand each other, Electra; let us be friends. I have forgiven you for the great unkindness you did me, although it has cost me, and it still costs me, more trouble than you know, because it has put me in a false light before the only woman I love or can ever love," he went on, in a strongly impressive voice. "I want you to undo that wrong—you only can do it—for my sake—for me who holds a brother's love almost for you. You will do it, won't you? You will explain to Kate Vance the mischievous prank you played upon me that evening, when I declare to you that nothing unpleasant will come to you for the confession, but a great deal of good instead."

He spoke with soft pleading; but if he had expected to melt her to his mood, he was greatly mistaken.

Every bit of color went out of her face, leaving it as white as that of a corpse, and her eyes were scintillating with defiance as she lifted them to his, saying fiercely:

"No—I will not explain—not to save her life, and yours too! I would see her lying dead here, before I would do it!"

She lifted her foot and brought it down with a vicious stamp upon the yielding grass, as if it was upon the body of her rival, whom she had pictured as lying dead there.

Ray Sylvane turned his back upon her, and glanced up the river with little knots drawn upon his fine face.

He realized that further argument, further importunity with her would be useless; that he could as soon turn the current of that ceaselessly flowing river, as he could turn her from her fixed purpose to hold him and Kate Vance apart if she had the power to do so.

He knew the cause of that obstinate resistance, too. Knew it with a thrill at his heart which, notwithstanding the trouble it gave him, was not wholly unmixed with pleasure. For he knew that it was love for him that actuated her, and she was such a beautiful woman!

It was hard to be angry with her for that, the vanity of human nature cried out against it: so when he turned toward her again after a half minute's whirling thought, he spoke gently.

"Your decision is very unkind, Electra, I can't help feeling that, but I won't urge you any further. I am going away from here to-day, I have made my mind up to that, and I don't want to part with you in anger, because we may never meet again."

He was looking down into her face, and he saw a wave of color rush over, and recede as swiftly, leaving it wanly white. He saw her sway unsteadily like a reed shaken by a gust of wind, and he stretched out his arm and threw it around her, feeling that she was about to fall.

But in an instant her strong nerves reasserted themselves, and she slid from his clasp, and turning without a word, she went swiftly away up the green eminence, and he watched her disappear amid the green trees on its summit.

"I can accomplish nothing by remaining here," he muttered, as he slowly resumed his slow pace along the willow-edged shore. "It is better that I should go away—better for more sakes than one, perhaps."

Then, still slowly walking along the margin of the shining river that rolled on and on with its ceaseless music, he muttered again to himself:

"I will go back to the Headlands. I will go back to Kate—back to the village where she is, at any rate—where I can at least see her day after day, God bless her, if I cannot be allowed to speak to her; and something may happen to bring us together again. I will go back. I will appear in the field, and trust to Providence to give me victory."

Having settled that point in his mind, the little knots of perplexity went out of his face, and he turned and went with a resolute step back to the village, and made his way to the Red Star.

The bell sounded for dinner as he stepped upon the little veranda, so he passed on to the long hall where the table was spread, and around which the rustic boarders were gathering.

The mail, which was brought into the village at noon always by a boy on horseback, and was received and distributed by the landlord of the Red Star, who was the postmaster of the place, had come in during his absence, and as he took his seat at the table, the mild-voiced host handed him a newspaper, saying:

"This is all the mail that came for you to-day, Mr. Sylvane."

With a nod of thanks, Ray took the paper and unfolded it, running his eyes over the columns while waiting for his dinner to be served.

In the column of correspondence, a letter dated "The Headlands—June 10th," caught his attention, and with a quickening of the heart he read it over.

It was short, and only one paragraph of it interested him, and that drove the color from his cheeks.

That paragraph was:

"There are comparatively few guests here at present, although every day adds to the number. The acknowledged beauty of the place is Miss Vance, the only daughter of Colonel Richard Vance, of Silver Bend, Kentucky. It is rumored that she has made a conquest of Count Von Hirschberg, a German celebrity who is summering here, and it is further rumored that they will be married in the autumn."

Ray Sylvane crushed the paper in his hand, and thrust it into his pocket.

He had no appetite for the frugal and well-cooked dinner that was brought to him. There seemed to be a lump in his throat which hindered him from swallowing readily.

He only quaffed the strong coffee which he had ordered, and then he left the table, and went to the little room which served the double purpose of office and bar-room, and spoke to the young man who shouldered the responsibilities of both departments.

"The regular packet is due here this afternoon, is it not?" he asked; and the young man responded:

"Yes, sir, she'll be apt to be along about four or five o'clock."

"Make out my bill, if you please," Ray said, brusquely; "I am going away."

The clerk turned to a great musty book, which he opened, and drawing a sheet of paper before him, and dipping a pen in a dusty ink-bottle, he hastily scratched a few lines on the paper, which constituted a receipted bill, and thrust

it across the counter to Ray Sylvane, who merely glanced at the amount specified on it, and paid it.

Then he went up to his room, and packing his valise, he took it and went away to the river bank, to await restlessly the coming of the packet.

The slow hours dragged by while he waited, wandering along the bank with a fever of impatience over him, until the twilight star broke like a silver blossom on the sky.

Then, and not until then, he heard the startling whistle of the delayed steamer, and in a half hour afterward he was on board of it, and was passing down the river over which the night was darkening.

"She is mine—mine only, by every right," Ray Sylvane muttered, as he stood looking down at the troubled waters, "and it will go hard if I give her up. I will not do it without a struggle!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SUSPICION.

WHEN Ray Sylvane landed at the Headlands, it was late at night, and the great multitudes of stars shone like diamond dust on the sky, and were reflected by the ocean.

It was past midnight, and the village was sleeping in the phosphoric glow sent down from the stars, and the lights were extinguished in all the houses except the hotels, where a steady radiance poured from the windows of the office of each, and where a sleepy clerk nodded in his chair, and waited for the arrival of guests whom passing steamers might put off to be accommodated with bed and board at the Headlands hotels.

Toward one of those points of light that shone from the window of Beach House, Ray Sylvane made his way, and presented himself before the sleepy clerk in the office, who nodded to him and addressed him by name.

"Can I have my old room?" Ray asked, and the young man, rising stiffly, and accompanying his movements with a yawn, went to the register and bent over the page.

"Your room was No. 19. No, sir; it's occupied now by a gentleman and his wife. The fact is, we're pretty full to-night; the Alaska brought in a crowd at noon, and we haven't got a vacant room. I can give you a bed to yourself, but you'll have to occupy the same room with another gentleman; it's the best we can do for you!"

He looked inquiringly over the register and across the counter at Ray, who was waiting, valise in hand, on the other side of the desk, and who responded with something of nervous sharpness:

"Well, let me have the bed as soon as possible, for I am tired and want to rest."

"All right, sir," the clerk responded, and closing the register with a sounding bang, he came around the counter and passed out of the office, followed by Ray Sylvane, and climbing the dimly lighted stairs, he knocked on the door of a room opening into the hall above.

He was compelled to repeat the alarm three or four times before he succeeded in arousing the inmate from his heavy slumber. But that he was awakened at last was manifested by the sound of muffled steps crossing the floor, and by the quick turning of the key in the lock.

The door was only slightly opened, and a pair of eyes peered out, and a curt voice issued through the narrow space:

"What's wanted?"

"I want to put a gentleman into this room to sleep," the clerk responded, and the door was opened wider in order that the gentleman might enter; and then came again the muffled sound of quick steps as the first occupant of the apartment retreated to his bed.

Ray entered and closed and locked the door after him. Then he made his way to the table on which a lamp was dimly burning, and brightened the flame.

As he did so, he very naturally cast a glance toward the bed on which his room-mate was lying, and he encountered the gaze of that person fixed curiously upon himself.

It was a square face lying there on the pillow, cleanly shaven save for a heavy, brown mustache; the features were all strong and clearly cut, and the eyes gazing out from under thick brows were gray and bright, and very shrewd.

All this Ray Sylvane noticed in the swift glance he cast toward him, and then he turned away and went to the other end of the room where his bed was, and prepared himself as rapidly as possible to retire, feeling rather than seeing that the eyes of his room-mate were still upon him, and realizing that they had an effect to render him uneasy.

He turned down the wick of the lamp again, and turned into bed, but he could not sleep. He was haunted, as he had been ever since he had read it, by that paragraph in the newspaper relating to Kate Vance, and the person styling himself Count von Hirschberg.

He didn't like the German. He had eaten at the same table with him for several days, and he had always looked on him with growing distrust. He would have felt the same way toward him if he had never associated him in his mind with that offensive intimacy with the woman he

himself loved, the woman whom he could not help regarding, because of what had passed before, as his own, as his sacred possession.

He distrusted Count von Hirschberg. It cost him an effort to think of him as a gentleman, because he seemed to him to be so lacking in all the instincts of one.

"He seems to me to be only an inflated humbug, whom I always feel like puncturing," he said to himself in an indistinct growl. "If he really has the impudence to be paying court to Kate, I shall find out whether he really is a pearl or a bit of foam."

With the lullaby of the waves washing on the shore, blending with the deep, regular breathing of the man in the other bed, making a drowsy melody around him, he fell at last into a troubled sleep, in which there came dreams of Kate Vance, and Count von Hirschberg, and Electra Dean.

It was not to be wondered at that his waking thoughts should become visions to haunt his sleep. But it was strange that in those visions the square face and marked features of his room-mate, as he had looked upon them in the lamp-light, should also mingle constantly.

So persistently had that face dipped in and out of his dreams, that when he waked with a start, and saw it before him in the gray dawn, it did not surprise him.

The owner of that face was at the moment incasing his square form, which was short and muscular, into a coat of rather worn black cloth; but his shrewd eyes, which seemed to be always on the alert for something, were employed in searching the face of his room-mate, who, lifting his lids, detected him, and nodded to him, saying:

"You are an early riser, sir. The sun will not appear for some time yet."

"No, not for half an hour or more," the square-built individual responded, and his voice was clear and sharp. "I want to get up to the top of the headlands in time to see it rise."

"If I was ready I would accompany you," Ray Sylvane said, speaking impetuously.

"Well, get ready," the other responded, in that easy, off-hand way which indicates that a person is accustomed to meeting and associating with strangers, and seems also to indicate that a person has no home ties. "I will wait for you to join me out on the veranda."

He opened the door and passed out as he spoke, and Ray Sylvane arose, and making a hurried toilet, followed.

He found the square-built gentleman, indeed, as he had said, waiting for him on the veranda, and the two went away together over the dew-damp sand toward the head-

lands, which towered up dark and rugged in the gray of the morning.

Ray Sylvane looked curiously down into the strong, resolute face, which was at least a foot below his own, and asked with that abruptness which sometimes characterized him:

"What is your name, sir? Tell me something about yourself, please."

His companion seemed to receive this evidence of curiosity as a most natural expression, and evinced no surprise nor resentment at it. He thrust his left hand through Ray's arm, and with his right he lifted a plug of tobacco to his lips, and bit off a liberal piece before he responded:

"My name is Harker—Josiah Harker, and I live in New York city."

The information seemed to be very meager to Ray Sylvane; a singular idea was with him that the man could tell so much, if he would; he seemed, singularly enough, to be a sort of repository for mysteries; a sort of human casket in which many and great secrets were shut.

"You impress me so strangely," Ray said, with impulsive candor.

To this admission the man made no comment, he only walked on with his hand on his arm, and vigorously champed his tobacco.

"You seem to me to be a sort of puzzle that I want to dissect, to see through," Ray went on after a minute, laughing a little, but nevertheless very much in earnest.

"You can do that easy enough. It isn't a hard matter to look through any man, or anything. All you want to begin with is a little clew."

As he said that, he raised his hand and thrust his thumb and forefinger absently into his vest pocket.

At his words a flood of light seemed suddenly to pour into the understanding of Ray Sylvane, and he paused abruptly and said, with his brown eyes fixed on the square face beside him:

"I would stake heavily on the chances that you are a detective."

Not a particle of change came into Mr. Harker's face, nor was there the slightest indication of surprise or displeasure in his voice as he responded:

"I told you that all you needed to find out anything was a clew to work on, and I gave one to you in the very word I used. I did it purposely, too. I know that you are a man to be trusted. I read you easily, and I may require some little assistance in a matter that I have on hand."

"What is it?" Ray Sylvane asked.

They were climbing the headlands now, and Mr. Harker did not respond until they were seated on its summit, and their faces were turned toward the reddening east.

"What you can do for me," the detective, as he acknowledged himself to be, said, in his quiet, matter-of-course way, "is very little, and I wouldn't take you into my confidence for it, except for the fact that I am willing for you, as you are my room-mate, to know all about me, and I am a sufficient judge of human nature to know that I can trust you not to reveal any secret of mine that I wish to be kept inviolate. I am on the track of a set of diamonds which were stolen from a lady in a hotel in New York six months ago. I have an idea that the jewels are here, in this village. I fancy that you are a lady's man, which I am not, and what I want you to do, is to notice the diamond rings on their fingers, and when you see a large solitaire notice if there is a little irregularity about the shape of the stone, as if a piece had been chipped off it. And notice then if it is not because the claw that holds that part differs from the others, by diverging into a cross."

Ray Sylvane's face was knotted.

Where was it—on whose finger was it that he had seen just such a ring?

Was it at a table?

He lifted his hand to his forehead in an effort of memory.

"I have seen just such a ring as you describe," he said, "but where I cannot remember. I will try to recall it to mind."

He was interrupted by the sound of voices, and looking hastily around, his eyes fell on Kate Vance and Count von Hirschberg, who were advancing toward them, and who evidently had not seen them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE ALERT.

THE man calling himself the Count von Hirschberg, and Kate Vance came on side by side, and yet without perceiving the two men sitting together there on the brow of the headland, because the count was talking earnestly to her, with his head, on which rested a broad brim hat, bent low over her, and she was listening with down-cast eyes, and a flush on her face, which Ray Sylvane felt with a jealous pang was not caused wholly by the exercise of climbing the eminence.

He sprang impulsively to his feet, and Harker rose more slowly.

Then the self-absorbed pair became aware of their proximity, and halted abruptly.

Ray Sylvane, yielding to the impulse to speak to her, to force recognition from her, advanced toward her, but she deliberately wheeled, so that her back was to him, and there was no alternative for him but to pass on—which he did with a flushed face and a stormily-beating heart, followed by Harker.

Ray Sylvane walked recklessly down the steep incline, and the detective, more careful in his movements, was left several yards behind him by the time he had accomplished the descent. But by dint of extra exertion in walking, he caught up with him as he strode on over the sandy plain below.

“Do you know anything about Count von Hirschberg?” Harker asked, speaking rather pantingly, because of the unusual exercise he had been compelled to take in order to reach the side of his companion.

“No,” Ray answered, curtly; and then he turned his face and fixed his eyes penetratingly on the countenance of the detective, and asked:

“Do *you* know anything of him? I ask because his name is being connected with that of the young lady who is with him, and who is a person very dear to me.”

In his earnestness he had halted, and the two men were standing looking into each other's eyes.

“No,” Harker answered, sententiously; and then he shrugged his square shoulders and walked on, and Ray kept pace at his side.

A silence of five minutes ensued between them, and then the detective asked:

“How much does the young lady know of him, do you think? Do you suppose that her knowledge of him and his antecedents is confined wholly to what he says of himself?”

“I don't know,” Ray responded, in a tone of mingled pain and anger. And then he added after a minute, speaking bitterly:

“It is currently rumored, I hear, that she is going to marry him.”

He unclosed his lips as if to add something else to his remarks, but he shut them again over the words.

“I would advise her not to be in too great a hurry,” the detective remarked, dryly, but with so much of hidden meaning in his tone, that Ray again halted abruptly in his walk, and laying his hand on his companion's arm, said earnestly, while a deeper flush mounted into his face, and a brighter gleam came into his eyes:

“Harker, tell me what you mean! You will not refuse

when I tell you that that woman is more to me than anything else on earth; that her happiness is greater to me than my own."

The detective again shrugged his broad shoulders, and made a suggestive movement with his heavy brows, as he responded:

"I know actually nothing whatever about him. He may be all he pretends to be, but I doubt it, and it is because of that doubt that I am here."

Ray Sylvane caught his breath in a quick way.

"What do you suspect? Tell me," he said, his hand tightening in its grasp on the detective's arm.

"It would be hardly fair to do so," Harker responded. "You know I told you that we detectives work often on the slenderest clues, and those clues often mislead us. So it is better to say nothing where there is such uncertainty."

"You are afraid to trust me," Ray said with deep and impressive earnestness. "But you need not be. Whatever you may tell me, I swear on the honor of a gentleman, and I *am* a gentleman, I will keep inviolate."

Harker's shrewd eyes, accustomed to reading faces as if they were printed pages, saw the sincerity in his, and saw that he was a person he could indeed trust, and who might, perhaps, be of service to him even, so he responded candidly:

"I have reason to suspect that this same Count von Hirschberg is an adventurer, and that he is moreover a thief, or at best, the receiver of stolen goods. I suspect that he at this instant knows better than any one else does where the diamonds of Mrs. Dulany of New York city are, and it is to find out if my suspicion is correct that I am here. But don't breathe it to a human being, or I may be frustrated in the search, and after all, my suspicion is *only* a suspicion. I have as yet not one thread of proof to bind my faith to."

"Trust me; tell me all you know, and all you suspect, and your reasons for suspecting," Ray said, with little drops coming on his flushed face, as if the spray of the ocean washing on the beach near by had fallen on it.

The detective hesitated only for an instant, glancing thoughtfully away toward the east, where the sun was showing now like a great clot of blood, and then he said, starting slowly along again, with Ray Sylvane keeping pace with him:

"The diamonds were stolen in the Astor House, where Mrs. Dulany, a wealthy widow, was boarding. She suspected a servant girl, who was engaged to be married to one of the head waiters, of the theft. The girl, by name

Wilhelmine Bachman, a German girl, has disappeared, and the most diligent search for her has failed to discover her. Her lover, the waiter, who was also a German, named Max Rosenfield, has also disappeared, and I have an idea that this same Count von Hirschberg is Max Rosenfield, cleverly disguised as a titled foreigner, and making a swell on those very jewels, perhaps, that are worth ten thousand dollars, and other stolen possessions of more or less value. I traced the scoundrel, Rosenfield, to a small hotel on the levee, and as this very same Count von Hirschberg, whom no one seems to have heard of before, took passage on a steamer the day after the discovery of the theft, the idea struck me that he might be the absconding waiter, and I am here to discover if my suspicion has any foundation in fact. You see how meager the clew is, and how necessary it is to work quietly and secretly so that my design may not be frustrated by a knowledge that I am on that business, which would, of course, make him more wary if he is the culprit."

The mist, which had resembled the fineness of spray, had become beaded drops now on the forehead of Ray Sylvane, and he drew his breath hard between his teeth, as he exclaimed, mutteringly:

"My God, it is terrible, and *she* associates with him on terms of equality! She even contemplates marrying him, perhaps! The matter must be sifted, and that, too, speedily."

They were near the hotel where they were stopping by this time, and the detective said:

"With your regard for the young lady, you can be at least an earnest and secretive aid to me. Together we may be able to tear the mask from the villain if he really is wearing one. Come up with me to our room, and I will give you a minute description of the stolen jewels, and we will form some plan of proceeding."

So they passed into the hotel and went together to the room which they shared in partnership, and there they formed a partnership in the search into the antecedents of Count von Hirschberg, who was at the time uttering protestations of love to haughty Kate Vance on the sunlit summit of the headland.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON BOARD THE SWAN.

Two weeks passed by, and the detective found no evidence in support of the suspicion he entertained against Count von Hirschberg, although he had watched most assiduously to obtain the slightest hint that would point in

the direction of his guilt, and he had been aided in the search by Ray Sylvane.

Never had man a more diligent assistant in any endeavor than Harker had in Ray Sylvane, who was goaded on to earnestness by the most powerful motives that ever actuated any man—love and jealousy.

In those two weeks he had not once been permitted to speak with Kate Vance, and the note he had sent pleading for an interview had been returned to him with only the penciled words traced across the envelope:

“Returned with the hope that no more may be sent from the same source.”

He was forced to maintain silence where he was burning to speak, not only to plead his own cause with her, but to give her such vague hints as he felt that he dared to express against her wooer.

Hour after hour, as the days flew by, he was compelled to see the little pleasure-boat, containing the woman he loved and her favored suitor, skimming over the clear bosom of the ocean; hour after hour, as the time passed, he was compelled to see them loitering together on the golden sands, she seeming as absorbed in the society of that hated rival as she had ever been in his own in the happy past at Silver Bend.

In the jealous watch he maintained over them he lost his color and his flesh, and to a great extent his good nature, and he gained absolutely nothing which could be held in proof that the German was other than the titled gentleman of leisure he represented himself to be.

So the weeks flew by, and at last the golden July was ushered in, and if Ray Sylvane gained nothing in Miss Vance's favor, the Count von Hirschberg certainly did, for it came to be known about that time, that they had been formally betrothed, and that the marriage between them was set to take place early in October.

One morning, as Ray was wandering moodily on the beach, Harker joined him, and linking his arm in that of the young gentleman, he said:

“Our bird is about to fly away.”

“What do you mean?” Sylvane asked, halting abruptly in his walk, and speaking sharply.

“I mean that Von Hirschberg has settled his bill at the hotel, and that he has declared his intention of leaving the Headlands to-day. I understand, furthermore, that Colonel Vance has given up the little cottage, and that he and his daughter are also to go away to-day. Very likely Von Hirschberg means to accompany them.”

Ray Sylvane's face had taken a vivid color, and he began

to walk on again with deep wrinkles drawn on his forehead.

"Where did you get your information?" he asked, sharply.

"Partly from the clerk at our hotel, who receipted the count's bill, and partly from a general rumor to that effect," the detective answered. And then he added, in a tone of discontent:

"I was never more certain of any unproven thing than I am that the fellow is a cheat, but I have no means of ascertaining the fact. I am doubtful, however, about his being the man, Max Rosenfield, who disappeared from the Astor House, because I can find no trace to connect him with the girl, Wilhelmine Bachman, nor the stolen diamonds. I will leave him for awhile, and turn my attention to finding the missing girl. It is the diamonds, after all, that I am in search of, and not the antecedents of Von Hirschberg."

"And I am concerned about the diamonds only so far as they may be connected with him," Ray Sylvane said, fiercely, "and if you abandon your espionage over him I shall not do so. I will follow him wherever he goes—if he goes with her."

He made a motion with his hand toward the lofty headland near which was situated the cottage in which Kate Vance sojourned, and Harker knew that he alluded to her.

"The justice or wrong of the suspicion against him will be proven when the girl, Wilhelmine Bachman is discovered," he said, convincingly.

For a few minutes they walked on in silence, and then he exclaimed:

"An idea suggests itself to me—I will insert a notice in *The Daily Advertiser*, which is the medium by which the working classes make their wants known generally, addressed to Wilhelmine Bachman, and stating that the person she regarded as her lover is about to marry a lady at Silver Bend in Kentucky. It may reach her eyes, but it will hardly fall under the notice of Miss Vance or any of her friends, and if the Bachman girl is like most of her sex, it will be a notice that will rouse her to manifest herself at Silver Bend. It is at any rate worth the trial."

"Yes, it is worth the trial," Ray Sylvane responded, gloomily, but with the look in his face as of one who saw a battle from afar, and was eager for the fray. "You may pursue your own course," he went on, digging his heels fiercely into the yielding sand at every step, "but I shall pursue Count Von Hirschberg."

As he spoke, he turned toward the hotel, and Harker

kept pace with his rapid movements, and so returned to the house with him.

Ray Sylvane, having ascertained for himself that the German had really declared his intention of leaving the village that day on the steamer *Swan*, which was due at that point, also paid off his own bill, and packed his valise to be ready also for departure at a moment's notice.

"If he goes with her, I shall go also," he muttered to himself, and he kept his word.

At twilight the *Swan* came steaming into the port, and among the passengers it took on board at the Headlands, were Colonel Vance and Kate, and by her side was Count von Hirschberg, and following not far behind them was Ray Sylvane.

"I will watch over her. I will save her from him if human power can avail to do so," he told himself, and there settled in his mind a strong conviction that he would do so.

The *Swan* went swimming out on the broad ocean under the gleaming stars, and from his position on the guards Ray Sylvane watched Kate Vance and Count von Hirschberg, who were sitting and talking together not a dozen steps from him, and both of whom seemed utterly oblivious, or unmindful, of his proximity.

Ray Sylvane set his teeth hard together as he watched them.

He felt that it would be a blessed privilege to be permitted to punch the hay-colored head of the German as he bent over her in the dim light, and an insane idea of doing so presented itself to his mind.

He could not endure the sight much longer, he thought, and as they had devined the thought, they arose after awhile, and went away into the cabin, and Ray Sylvane remained alone with his bitter thoughts.

"How should he proceed?"

For the thousandth time he was putting the question to himself, walking moodily up and down on the deck, with his eyes downcast.

Lifting his head after awhile, and glancing upward, he started, and the sudden throbbing of his heart almost smothered him, as he saw, standing and leaning listlessly against one of the great posts of the boat, Kate Vance.

Without a moment's consideration, he went forward and laid his hand upon her arm.

"Kate, I must speak to you, and you must listen," he said sternly.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DIAMOND RING.

A FEELING of restlessness had come over Kate Vance, and had induced her to excuse herself from any longer entertaining Von Hirschberg, on the plea that her heart was aching wretchedly. But instead of retiring to her state-room, as she had intimated an intention of doing, she had gone out instead on the guards, in order that the cool, refreshing breeze might blow on her temples, which were, in truth, throbbing painfully.

The feeling of restlessness had been occasioned, as she knew—but why she did not know—by the sight of Ray Sylvane on the ship.

His proximity always disturbed whatever transient calmness was over her spirit, just as the breath of the storm agitates a glassy lake.

When she had at first caught a glimpse of him on the guards in the serene starlight, she had not by word or sign intimated that she had done so; yet her heart began to beat tumultuously, and the blood to run riot in her veins.

Why had he power to affect her thus?

She never put the question to herself, she never sought to analyze that effect, to trace it to its source, in order to see from what passion or impulse it came. She only told herself over and over again that she hated him, and that she meant to convince him how speedily she could console herself for the loss of his homage, by accepting that of another man.

And that other man chanced to be presented to her in the person of Count Von Hirschberg.

When she went out on the guards again, after excusing herself to the German, she did not see Ray Sylvane, who was, indeed, hidden from her sight at the moment, by some intervening obstacle, and she thought he had gone below; so his unexpected touch on her arm, and the unexpected sound of his voice in her ear, startled her so that as she turned quickly and saw him standing there, she uttered a smothered exclamation.

In an instant she wrenched her arm from his clasp, and recoiled from him, saying with fiery indignation:

“How can you have the audacity, sir, to approach me, to speak to me, much less, to lay the weight of your fingertips even upon me?”

Her wrath did not abash him. He was determined not to be driven away from her this time unheard, so he said, speaking rapidly:

“I am only to be permitted to speak to you for five

minutes. Surely I have the right to do that in consideration of the great love I have felt for you so long."

She lifted her fine form up until she looked like a tragic queen in the soft light, and laughed mockingly.

"I know that you consider me a traitor to you," he went on rapidly, "that you will hear no explanation of the conduct which you consider was a deadly insult to you. But I tell you, Kate Vance, that the time will come when you will listen to that explanation from other lips than mine, and I will stand exonerated of any willful wrong toward you. I am content to hold myself in patience until that time comes, which I feel will not be long, and I implore you to wait also, not to put an impassable barrier between you and me until that time comes!"

There was something agonizing in the pleading of his low voice, and it may have touched her for a moment, for her haughty head was bent as if with a passing emotion. But it was only for a moment that she yielded to it. The next instant she had lifted it again, and was standing proudly erect in the starlight there before him.

"Ray Sylvane," she said, and her clear voice vibrated with strong feeling, "the past in which you mingled, in which you humiliated me so bitterly, is as dead to me as if it had never been. You are no more to me than the skeleton which may be lying under our feet at the bottom of the sea this moment. I beg to assure you that it gives me no sorrow—not one throb—to think of you thus. I beg to assure you that you have not been able to put a lasting pain into my life, as you may suppose in your vanity that you have done. In proof of the fact, I will, in less than three months' time, be the wife of another man—a man whom I have no fear will attempt to deceive me!"

She seemed to feel a sort of mad joy in telling him this, and she threw back her regal head, and her bosom rose and fell as she did it.

Ray Sylvane drew nearer to her, and grasped her arm, and so held her firmly as he said hoarsely.

"I have fear that he will deceive you, then. Mark my words, if you persist in marrying him, greater humiliation will fall upon you than came to you from me!"

He had spoken with such deep intensity of feeling that she was impressed by it. A chill ran over her, like that which comes from an idea of impending calamity.

She unclosed her lips to ask him what he meant, but a sudden revulsion of feeling came over her, and she lifted her right hand, her left arm being in his grasp, and made a gesture as if she were driving him from her.

"Release my arm, Ray Sylvane!" she said, indignantly, "and never dare to lay your polluting touch upon me

again. Release me, I say, or I will scream out for protection."

"There is no need for you to do that," he said, coldly, stepping a few paces back from her. "I was not even conscious that I *had* touched you. I will not offend you in that way again. I only meant to warn you, as much for your own sake—because you have been so much to me in the past—as for my own."

His voice softened, and quivered into husky indistinctness, and again it seemed to touch and to soften her.

She turned her face from him, and spoke with her eyes bent on the reflection of a particularly bright star in the water:

"Whatever your motive was, see to it that it does not move you to approach me again. A gulf has come between us that can never be bridged over. An insult has been offered me by you which not all the waters in the ocean could wash out. I care nothing for it now," she went on, her voice hardening again into that clear, metallic ring, and turning her head so that the glance of her flashing eyes came upon him in the dim light, "I rejoice at it, since it has freed me from you, and has thrown my life's happiness into the hands of Count von Hirschberg!"

Again she seemed to derive a sort of mad delight from flinging that assertion at him, and a groan broke from him as he heard it.

"Kate, Kate?" he cried, impetuously, reaching his clasped hands in a supplicatory way toward her, "cast me off if you will, hate and despise me if you will, but don't marry the man calling himself the Count von Hirschberg. I distrust him—for your sake I fear him. Don't wreck your hope of happiness by marrying him. He is not worthy of you."

"Perhaps you considered yourself unworthy of me, and that was the reason you jilted me at the last moment!" she said, with a harsh, grating laugh; and then she added, fiercely, sending the words through her teeth, "Whatever else Count von Hirschberg may be unworthy of, he is certainly incapable, I think, of doing such a dastardly act as that! For that reason, if for no other, I am glad that fate has given me to him instead of to you. I am glad that the wedding set to take place between us on the tenth of April was frustrated by you, and I am glad to know that the wedding set to take place on the fourth of October next will be entirely out of your power to prevent!"

Saying that, passionately, she turned and walked swiftly away, leaving him to stare alone at the cold reflections of the stars in the water through which the boat was moving.

"Don't be too sure that it will be out of my power to prevent that marriage," he muttered, indistinctly. "I shall certainly try to prevent it; and something tells me that I shall succeed."

Then he fell to counting on his fingers how many days intervened between that hour and the fourth of October.

He turned after a few minutes to resume his restless pacing up and down on the deck, which had been interrupted by the appearance of Miss Vance on the guards.

He had only taken a step, however, when he halted abruptly.

His downcast eyes had been caught by a glittering speck at his feet, which looked as if it had been a grain of dust fallen from some one of the myriad stars overhead.

He stooped and picked it up, and then he discovered that it was a ring.

He took a match from his pocket and struck it on the heel of his boot, and then, by the light of the blazing splinter, he examined the ring.

As he did so, turning it about and about in his fingers, he uttered a sharp exclamation.

There was the claw flattened into the shape of a small cross on the diamond solitaire, just as it had been described by the detective, Harker.

The feeble light of the match revealed also an unusual flush on Ray Sylvane's face, and an unusual flash in his eyes.

The splinter burned down to his fingers, and he dropped it on the floor and set his foot upon it, in order that it might be thoroughly extinguished.

"With this ring I will set my foot, perhaps, on Count Von Hirschberg!" he muttered. "With this ring I will, perhaps, render him powerless to ruin the life of Kate Vance."

He thrust the treasure-trove deep into his pocket, and went into the boat with the consciousness of power in himself which he had not known for many a day.

CHAPTER XXI.

BAFFLED.

RAY SYLVANE found it impossible to sleep that night, his mind was in such a world of conjecture.

The central idea around which all the others revolved, however, was that he had, as he believed, the stolen ring of Mrs. Dulany of New York city in his possession.

He believed, furthermore, from the spot on which he had found it, and which was the exact place where Kate Vance

had been standing in the starlight, that it had fallen from her finger.

"Her fingers are small and this ring is large for a lady," he said, turning it around and around on his own finger, where he had concluded to place it for safety. "To-morrow morning I will ask her about it, and if she acknowledges that the German gave it to her, I will tell her the history of it, as I believe, and also the suspicion attaching to him."

The night dragged itself slowly away, and slowly the gray dawn crept over the vessel, moving on its trackless way like a great bird.

In the fever of impatience that was over him, Ray Sylvane welcomed that pallid light as he had never welcomed any other day break, and he arose and made his toilet, and went out on the deck.

None of the passengers, of whom there were about a score, were abroad as yet, and he watched the brightening of the day alone.

"She will be likely to come out to watch the sunrise on the ocean," he said to himself, and so tried to hold himself in patience until she should appear.

He was burning with anxiety to show her the ring—to tell her the suspicion attaching to Von Hirschberg.

"She will cast him off, then," he went on muttering to himself, "as she would a disgusting reptile. She is so proud, and so honorable in all her dealings."

There was a faint reddening where the edges of the sea and sky met in the east, as it were the flush of wine, which heralded the coming of the sun, and as Ray Sylvane noticed it, he glanced around again, in quest of Miss Vance, whom he felt would appear.

The presentiment did not deceive him, for there she was, passing slowly on to the opposite side of the vessel, but halting at a point which commanded a view of the sunrise.

She had not perceived him, the glance of her clear blue eyes had wandered past him without noticing him, and were fixed on the sunrise flush which gave the sea and sky where they met a soft rosiness, like the blush which is awakened by the first kiss of love.

Ray Sylvane noticed that her beautiful face was unusually pale, and that it wore a tired look, as if she had not slept well.

He approached her, and spoke her name softly, his heart being touched by the sight of that weary look about her mouth, and those dark circles under her eyes.

She started at the sound of his voice, and lifted her hand, and rested it flutteringly over her heart.

"When I parted from you last night, it was with the understanding that you should never speak to me again,"

she said, her face flushed, and a deep frown plowed like two furrows between her eyes. "Why do you intrude on me again?"

"I intrude on you," he said, speaking calmly, confidently, while a singular thrill of exultation ran through his voice. "I intrude on you in order to return this ring to you which I suspect is your property, or rather, it is an article which I fancy you lost."

He held the ring toward her as he spoke, and she glanced at it, and answered coldly:

"I did drop it—but it is not my property."

"Will you be kind enough to tell me whose property you suppose it is?" he asked—and there was so much of insinuation in his voice that she said quickly, letting the hand which she was extending to take the ring fall at her side.

"Is it yours? If it is, keep it and welcome. I set up no claim to it."

The sharply uttered words surprised him; he could not comprehend their meaning.

"It was not I who gave it to you," he said, "then why should you suppose that I should claim it?"

"I don't know to whom it belongs," she responded, with an impatient shrug of her shoulders. "I only know that it is not mine."

At that moment they were joined by Count Von Hirschberg, who spoke to Kate, without in any way noticing the presence of Ray Sylvane.

"You rise early—you are so industrious dat you haf beat the sun."

Kate responded with a little laugh which was nervous and unnatural in its sound.

"You German's are noted for being sluggish," she commenced, but Ray Sylvane interrupted her light flow of words, by saying in a suppressed tone, as if by a heavy strain on his anger he kept it from breaking bounds.

"Will you be kind enough to give me your attention, Miss Vance, until we get through with the little matter we were discussing? Will you be kind enough to step aside with me where our conversation may be unheard by any one but ourselves?"

He darted a quick, withering glance at the German, and met that person's greenish eyes, which seemed to be taking aim at him over Miss Vance's shoulder.

"It is not necessary," she responded, seeming to take a sort of mad delight in saying it. "I have no secrets from Count Von Hirschberg. Whatever you have to say to me, you may say before him."

The color came and went, while she had been speaking, in quick dashes on his face, and when she ended, he ex-

claimed, holding the ring out between his unsteady finger and thumb so that the setting was plainly presented to the view of the greenish eyes of the German.

"Then what I have to say is, where did you get this ring?"

As he asked the question, he fixed a penetrating look, not upon her face, but on that of Count Von Hirschberg, because he felt that it was a test which would try him severely.

He saw the greenish eyes of the German turned on the ring for a moment, and then they were lifted, and were directed in a swift glance toward his own face.

What was the passing expression in those bold eyes? It was a singular one, and it baffled Ray Sylvane to interpret it.

Miss Vance spoke in a voice of passionate disdain.

"Do you lay any claim to the ring?" she asked.

"I most certainly do not!" he said, his face flushing with fiery anger, not against her, but against Von Hirschberg, who he felt, rather than saw, was regarding him insolently.

"Then, as it dropped from my finger last night, I will trouble you to give it back to me, or to Count Von Hirschberg," she added, with a sudden impulsiveness of a quick idea, and she swerved aside in order that she might not stand between them.

"And I decline to give it to him," Ray retorted, hotly. "Since you decline to take it from my hand, I will place it where I found it, on the floor here."

He dropped it from his fingers as he spoke, encountering a momentary glance of triumph from the greenish eyes of the German as he did so, for which he could have throttled him on the spot.

Von Hirschberg immediately stooped and picked it up, and gave it to Kate with some low words which Ray, as he turned away, filled with wrath and bitterness, did not hear.

He went on into the ship and to his stateroom.

"It could have come into her possession in no way except through him," he muttered, alluding to the German. "I will write to Harker and tell him. Perhaps the detective will find her less reticent on the subject."

He took some writing materials from his valise, and hurriedly, and with a trembling hand, he wrote to the New York detective an account of the ring, and suggested that he should come immediately to the village of Silverdale in Kentucky.

"I am convinced that your suspicions in regard to the fellow are correct," he wrote. "Lose no time in tracing

up the clew, for unless there are two rings of the kind you described to me, the one stolen from Mrs. Dulany is now in the possession of Miss Vance, and I am sure it was given to her by the man calling himself Count Von Hirschberg."

This he sealed and addressed to Harker, and as he glued the postage stamp on it he muttered:

"We shall see whether there will be a wedding at Silver Bend on the fourth of October. We shall!—we shall see!"

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EAVESDROPPER.

It was an evening in August, and the sun was hanging low over the western hill which skirted the village of Silverdale.

Slowly along the bank of the shining river two men were walking and talking earnestly together.

Up and down a narrow green space in front of a clump of swamp willows they were passing, traversing back and forth a distance of not more than twenty yards, their progress being limited to that by huge embankments of rocks on either side.

Concealed in that thick clump of willows, some one was listening eagerly to their conversation.

That unsuspected eavesdropper was Electra Dean, who had crept up, and hidden herself there unseen by either of the two men.

Those two men were Ray Sylvane and the detective Harker.

The willow thicket in which Electra Dean was hidden was about midway the space over which they were pacing, and they were never far distant from her in their slow walk to and fro, consequently much of their conversation fell distinctly on her ears.

"So you haven't seen Miss Vance to speak to her since you showed her the ring that morning on the ship?" Harker said interrogatively, his clear gray eyes staring straight before him.

"No," Ray responded, "she has given me no opportunity to do so, or I think I should have been tempted to have told her our suspicions in regard to the ring. You don't know how difficult it is," he went on, grinding his heels into the tender grass, while the furrows deepened on his forehead, "to remain inactive, as I have done in the last two weeks while that fellow, whom I have every reason to believe is a thief, is received as a favored suitor by the woman who should be my wife at this present time, if fortune dealt fairly by me."

"I don't question that fact," the detective responded, in-

differently. "But you should proceed very cautiously in a matter of this kind. He should have no intimation—nor should she—that you believe the ring she now wears was stolen by him, until there is some proof to bring in substantiation of your suspicion. If you had told her in a straightforward way that the ring had been stolen from Mrs. Dulany, at the Astor House, in New York, and that you had reason to believe the man who gave it to her, and who, of course, was Von Hirschberg, was the thief, she wouldn't have believed you, but would have considered that the whole story had been due entirely to your jealousy of Von Hirschberg, and had been invented solely for the purpose of breaking off her marriage with him. So it is better, if you want to interfere with that marriage, that you should keep quiet, and let me manage the matter."

To this speech, which was an unusually long one for Harker to make, Ray listened impatiently.

"But you are so deliberate," he said, "while I am burning with anxiety lest the fourth of October should roll around before sufficient proof has been gathered to convict Von Hirschberg as a fraud. You don't know what a terrible fear besets me that she may marry him! For her own sake I would rather see her dead and shrouded in her coffin—I would rather die myself—oh! a thousand times over, if possible—than to know she was his wife!"

His voice trembled with the strength of feeling that was over him at the moment, and as she heard, Electra Dean set her small teeth together to suppress a passionate cry that seemed to be rising in her throat.

"All I've got to say to *you*," Harker responded, in his cold, even tones, in which there never, by any chance, came a ripple of feeling—"all I've got to say to you, is to be quiet, and to leave me to deal with Von Hirschberg. I am going out to Silver Bend after tea this evening, and I am going to ask for the old gentleman—Colonel Vance."

In expressing his determination, the detective had taken his hand from Ray's arm, and he kept time with his words—or rather, he emphasized them with taps of his fingers on his left palm.

"I am going to tell old Colonel Vance," he went on, "that I have some business with Von Hirschberg that concerns him and his daughter equally with the German, and I will ask to see them all three together."

He paused so long after making that announcement, that Ray grew exasperated.

"Well, what do you propose to do then?" he asked, impatiently.

"I propose, then, to ask to look at the ring on Miss

Vance's finger—if it is on her finger—and I propose, then, to read her a description of Mrs. Dulany's stolen ring, written by Mrs. Dulany's own hand. And I propose then, right in the presence of Von Hirschberg, to ask her how the ring came into her possession."

"And so cover him with confusion, and take him so by surprise that he will not have presence of mind to vindicate himself, but will stand convicted in her sight, of a crime which will make her ashamed to remember that she ever thought of marrying him!" Ray said, his voice and his whole being shaken with the contemplation of those possible results.

The detective nodded his round head and his square face on his short neck, and the two walked on in silence for about five minutes.

Harker was the first to speak again:

"I put in the advertisement I told you of, for Wilhelmine Bachman two weeks ago, but have as yet heard nothing of her. It may be that she is dead, or has left the country. She would be the only person, I think, to clear up the mystery of Count von Hirschberg, with a glance. Because if he is Max Rosenfield, she would detect it, I fancy, let him disguise himself as he would."

Those last words were lost to Electra Dean, because the two men had left the green plat over which they had been sauntering, and were passing now through the gathering gloom, for twilight had fallen, toward the Red Star, the early lights of which, were already agleam in the small windows.

"You want to prevent the marriage of Kate Vance, do you?" Electra Dean muttered, creeping from her cover, and staring at the forms passing like moving shadows now toward the village tavern. "But you won't do it if I can help it! If the man she is going to marry is a thief as they think he is, why the more I want her to marry him, the proud jade! That cut of her whip on my shoulder seems to sting me yet, whenever I think of it. I am going to see Count von Hirschberg, as they call him, and I am going to let him into the secret of the plot those two have hatched against him. I am going to let him know what they are up to. I am going to put him on his guard!"

She said that in a fierce, determined way, and she accompanied the words with jerks of the head, which made her short curls quiver, and she started away in the deepening darkness, with a swiftness of foot which soon bore her out of sight over the hill; and never pausing for an instant, she went on toward Silver Bend, and crouched in the shadow of the great pine-trees on the avenue, waiting to see if, perchance, "the man who was to marry Miss

Vance," as he was called in the village, should pass that way alone.

Fortune favored her, for she had not waited over a half hour when he came sauntering down the walk smoking his after-supper cigar.

He started, and stared with surprise when Electra suddenly appeared before him, as unexpectedly as if she had fallen from the sky, saying:

"Let me speak to you, sir, for a few minutes. I want to tell you something that you will be glad to know of."

CHAPTER XXIII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

DRAWING Von Hirschberg back into the deep shadow of the trees with an involuntary touch of her finger on his arm, Electra Dean talked to him for several minutes in a rapid, earnest way, which held his attention, but elicited no word from him.

With his head bent so that he could peer down into her face by the light which a stray moonbeam, sifting through the somber boughs overhead, marked on it, he listened to all she said.

It was simply a verbatim report of the conversation she had heard from the two men on the river bank.

At its conclusion the German gave his hay-colored head a toss that came near dislodging his broad-brimmed hat, and said:

"What you haf told me does not concern me. If you think so, you mistake."

He did not thank her for either her information, or the motive which had moved her to give it to him—at least, if he felt any gratitude, he did not express it in words.

He turned abruptly away, and went out into the broad avenue, and continued his walk down it, while he puffed clouds of smoke from his cigar.

Electra also went away, passing on like a dark shadow amid shadows, and going swiftly to the little cottage in the ravine.

"Bah," she ejaculated to herself, commenting on the German, "he is a dog compared to Ray Sylvane!"

Von Hirschberg continued to stroll about over the grounds until his cigar was burned to a shortness that was dangerous to the continued existence of his long mustache.

As he threw the stump away, he saw some one coming up the avenue whom he recognized as Harker—with whose personal appearance he was perfectly familiar, having boarded in the same hotel with him at the Headlands.

Seeing him coming up the walk, he stepped aside into

the shadow of the trees, and watched him while he approached the house and rang the bell, and a minute afterward disappeared through the door which a negro man opened.

Then Von Hirschberg, inflating his chest with a deep breath, and throwing back his head, went also to the house, and entered the parlor, from which the notes of a piano were stealing, awakened by the practiced fingers of Miss Vance.

He drew up a chair, and took a seat beside her, his eyes falling on the magnificent diamond that glittered on her left hand, in company with another ring, which was only a broad plain circlet of gold.

"Your music draws me to you," he said, "just as your beauty does, only not so strongly. You have made me happy by saying dat you will marry me, but you haf never said dat you love me."

He bent nearer to her, with a languishing look in his greenish eyes, as if he would read her soul in her own, but she lowered the lids over them, and turned her face away with a sickly whiteness creeping over it.

He reached his hand out and touched hers, which was fingering the keys near him, and at that instant her father, followed by Harker, entered the room.

Colonel Vance wore a flushed and nervous look, and in a very nervous way he introduced Harker to Kate, and then to Von Hirschberg.

In the same nervous way he proffered a chair to the detective, and took one himself.

"Kate, this gentleman, Mr. Harker, has a communication to make to you," he said, speaking in his usual stern way, but with his pale blue eyes fixed on the face of Von Hirschberg. "He has told me something in regard to that ring on your finger that astonishes me greatly. I know nothing, as I have told him, about the article, because I knew nothing about it, and you have never told me anything of it."

A hot flush came in the face of Kate Vance, overspreading the pallor which had rested on it a few minutes before.

His words had recalled vividly to her mind the scene on the ship when Ray Sylvane had questioned her in the early morning about that same ring.

She lifted her hand, which trembled visibly, and looked down at the glittering jewel that shone in the lamplight like a spark of fire.

Von Hirschberg looked at her, and Colonel Vance, and the detective looked at Von Hirschberg.

"What do you want to know about the ring?" Kate

asked, haughtily, after a minute, glancing around at the detective.

"I simply desire to know, miss, where you obtained it?" Harker answered, in his sharp, curt tones.

"I presume you have a good reason to give for your inquisitiveness," she said, speaking always haughtily.

For reply the detective drew a note-book from his coat pocket, and opened it, and made a motion to hand it to her; but he seemed instantly to change his mind, for instead of giving the book into her hand, he retained it in his own, which he dropped on his knee.

"I have a good reason for wanting to know from whom you obtained it, and I can explain it better when you have answered the question. I assure you that I do not mean to be in any way impertinent or disrespectful to you, but I beg that you will tell me the name of the person who gave you that diamond ring."

Notwithstanding his assurance that he did not mean to be impertinent, Kate Vance was filled with fiery indignation.

She unclosed her lips to utter a disdainful refusal of his request, but her father, for whom she entertained the most profound respect, spoke.

"Mr. Harker has been explaining to me, Kate, and if I had not considered that he had the right to ask the question of you, I would not have brought him here to do it. I request you to answer it. As I said before, I have not noticed the ring, nor has my attention ever been called to it, but I ask you to tell me where you got it?"

Von Hirschberg's eyes were fixed intently on her face as she answered, turning the ring nervously about on her finger.

"I picked it up on the beach at the Headlands the evening we left there. Just as I was stepping into the small boat which was to convey us to the ship, I dropped my fan; as I stooped to pick it up, I saw this ring lying beside it, half hidden in the sand. I did not speak to my father about it, because that evening, and during the entire trip, he was confined to his stateroom with severe indisposition. Since then I have not thought of it."

That was all. In a straightforward way she told it, with every clearly uttered word bearing the stamp of truth.

A blank look came into the face of the detective, and an unmistakably triumphant one in the thin visage of the German, who pulled at the ends of his long mustache, and laughed through his teeth.

"I am sorry you know so little about it," Harker said, recovering his *sang-froid* instantly, and lifting the little book from his knee to refer to it.

"I will read you the description of a ring that was lost, with other valuable jewels, by a lady at the Astor House in New York, and you can tell better than I, since I have not examined it, whether the ring you found accords with this that was lost."

Then he began and read slowly item by item the very minute description, even to the small monogram, "A. D." engraved amid the carving of the gold; and Kate Vance took the ring from her finger, and examined it closely as he read.

"The description accords perfectly," she said, coldly, "and so I give it over to you. I know nothing more about it than I have told you."

The detective took the ring.

"It was stolen," he said, "and I have been employed to track down the thief. I am in search of an important witness, whom I hope to be able to produce in a short time. I am in hourly expectation of finding that witness."

As a final probe, he thrust that remark into the ears especially of Von Hirschberg, and he keenly watched its effect upon him.

Was it fancy, or did his tawny face really grow a shade whiter? And was the involuntary movement he made one of shrinking, as if he had seen a threatening hand suddenly uplifted to strike him?

He had certainly changed color, and he had as certainly made a nervous movement, but whether it was occasioned by conscious guilt and fear of discovery, the detective could not determine.

Harker apologized for his necessary intrusion, and bowed himself out.

"The trail grows warm," he muttered to himself as he went down the walk in the moonlight. "And it seems to be tending toward Count von Hirschberg. I will follow it up, and see if it reaches him?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILHELMINE BACHMAN.

THE day following the detective's visit to Silver Bend, Von Hirschberg left the neighborhood.

He had some matters of business to attend to, he said, in explanation of his departure, which would occupy his attention for some weeks, and it might not be possible for him to return to Silver Bend, until the day appointed for his marriage.

Ray Sylvane remained at the Red Star, filled with a constantly growing fever of anxiety.

The time passed to him as if its figurative wings were en-

dowed with more than double their usual speed, bringing nearer and nearer the fourth of October.

And day by day, as his chances for a reconciliation with Kate—a hope to which he tenaciously clung—diminished, the dearer she became to him.

During that time he had not caught even a glimpse of Electra Dean; but in his growing despair, his thoughts turned to her, and he determined to make one last desperate attempt to see her, and to try once more to induce her to make the confession which he felt sure would bring forgiveness to him from the woman he loved.

The days had glided on now into September.

The reports he had received from Harker were discouraging. He had shown the ring to Mrs. Dulany, and she had recognized it as belonging to the set of jewels she had lost, but further than that he had made no discovery. The notice to the missing Wilhelmine Bachman had been fruitless to discover her.

It was late in the afternoon. The day had been so intensely warm, that every breath of air floating through the garish sunshine seemed like the dry atmosphere from a hot oven.

Ray Sylvane had been all day long suffering with a dreadful attack of headache, and had been for hours in his room.

But the pain in his head was so aggravated by the painful thought that surged continually through his fevered brain that he felt further inaction would render him mad, so he arose and bathed his face, resolved to go that evening again to Electra Dean and try to make terms with her in some way to bring peace between himself and Kate.

He did not notice that the atmosphere had grown cooler, and he heard, without noticing it, the sound of the wind stirring against his window. So when he went out into the air, he was surprised to see that a storm was gathering, and that portentous clouds obscured the declining sun.

He stood irresolutely. He could not reach the cabin of Granny Dean before those clouds would break, letting down their pent-up waters.

“Heaven and earth seem to be combined to defeat me!” he muttered.

At that moment the signal whistle of the regular packet due there that day, broke startlingly on the rising wind.

Turning his eyes in the direction of the sound, he saw the coming boat with two columns of black smoke rising from its chimneys.

A strange presentiment came over him that that steamer would bring something of importance to him. He did not

know what, but an idea flashed into his head that it would put off the detective, Harker.

So impressed did he become with the fancy, that it took the shape of certainty in his mind, and he went down to the landing, and with a queer beating at the heart watched the packet as it steamed up to the shore.

But in his expectation of seeing Harker he was disappointed, for he did not appear.

There was only one passenger waiting on the lower deck for the gang-board to be put, and that was a woman, large and fair and having blue eyes.

Ray Sylvane, glancing carelessly at her, was struck by a look of sadness on her round face which was touching in its blended expressions of sorrow and patience.

The storm was rapidly approaching. The cloud, stretching like the wings of a great bird on the sky, widened and darkened at every moment; and the strong wind sweeping up the river, tossed and furrowed the waters.

As the blue-eyed woman, aided by the clerk of the boat, crossed the gang-board, the lightning played over her like a fiery serpent, and the thunder uttered a deafening roar, which the echoes in the neighboring hills caught up and belowed back.

"You had best make haste to the hotel yonder," the clerk said, as he parted from the woman, and turned to re-enter the boat, "or the rain will catch you."

The woman saw the wisdom of the warning, and started hurriedly in the direction of the Red Star; but she had only gone a few paces when the cloud broke and the rain descended in a perfect deluge.

The woman quickened her pace into a run, and Ray Sylvane ran after her, dexterously drawing off his coat, which he flung about her shoulders when he reached her, so as to protect her as much as possible from the driving rain.

"Allow me to assist you," he said, taking her valise and keeping pace with her rapid steps.

The rain-fall was so copious, however, that during the few minutes they were exposed to its fury they were thoroughly drenched.

Entering the hotel, Ray Sylvane conducted the woman to the parlor, and as he halted in the doorway, with the water dripping from his garments, he said:

"If you wish to take a room here, I will attend to it for you, if you would like me to do it."

"Thank you," the woman said, speaking in a rich, but melancholy voice. "I shall be very much obliged to you. I expect to remain at this place for a few days, at least."

Ray Sylvane bowed, and made a movement to go, but halted again to ask:

"What name shall I have registered?"

"Wilhelmine Bachman, of New York."

As the soft rich voice uttered the name distinctly, a dark flush swept into Ray Sylvane's face, and a tremor came to his limbs.

Wilhelmine Bachman!

This was the woman whom Harker confidently declared could explain whether or not the man styling himself the Count von Hirschberg was one and the same with the missing hotel waiter, and suspected thief, Max Rosenfield!

He approached her—in his eagerness he placed his hand on her arm, not noticing that she shrank modestly from his touch, and said:

"Tell me something. Do you know a German calling himself Count von Hirschberg?"

"I know no one bearing that name," she answered, quietly.

"But, perhaps, you know him by some other name?" he said, still speaking eagerly. "I doubt him. I want to know something of him, for he is to be married to a particular friend of mine in a few weeks. To the woman I love, and who, I believe, loves me," he went on with an uncontrollable burst of confidence.

There were bands of pink and white on the large, sad face of the woman as she answered quietly, with her great blue eyes looking truthfully into his:

"I came here to find out whether I know that man. When I see him, I will tell you. Please see about getting me a room now, where I can change my wet garments, for I am drenched with the rain."

She drew up her plump shoulders, and a shiver ran over her full fine form as if she were struck by a chill.

Ray Sylvane arose to do her bidding, but lingered to say:

"The man, Von Hirschberg, is not here now, he has gone away to attend to some business, I don't know where, but he may return any day. He will be sure to return in time for his marriage with Miss Vance, which is to take place on the fourth of October."

"If he proves to be the person I am searching for, the marriage will not take place," she said, with the pink lines deepening on her face, and a ring of power in her voice. "I will wait until he returns, and when I see him I will know at a glance whether I will have power to interfere with and prevent that marriage."

CHAPTER XXV.

IN DEADLY PERIL.

NEVER surely was there such a storm as that which roared over the village of Silverdale, all the night following the arrival of Wilhelmine Bachman at the Red Star tavern.

The tiny streams which gave their silvery tribute constantly to the picturesque river, became great, mad torrents, rushing into the river and swelling it to such unusual dimensions that it overran its banks as it had never done before, flooding the streets of Silverdale, which was situated on an eminence overlooking it.

At her open window, Kate Vance stood in the early morning, looking out at the drenched earth, and hearing, even from that distance the sullen roar of the river, which an intervening hill hid from her view.

"I would like to see the river," she said, turning to a negro woman who was arranging her room. "Go, Bell, and tell John to saddle White Foot for me. I think I will take a ride over the hill and see it."

The woman went out to do her bidding, and Miss Vance proceeded to don her riding habit, and then whip in hand, she went down to the veranda, in front of which a mulatto man was holding her brown horse, White Foot.

"You'll have to be careful about the branches, Miss Kate," he said respectfully, as he assisted her into the saddle and gave the reins into her hand. "I never saw Brush Creek as high as it is now. It washed away the old tobacco barn last night."

"I'll be careful not to drown myself or White Foot, John," the young lady responded, as she touched the spirited horse with her whip, and went cantering away. "It wouldn't be much matter though," she muttered to herself, "if I should be drowned. It might, perhaps, be a blessed thing for me. Seeing that I could hardly go to greater misery than I should leave by it."

Her face wore a look of suffering at the moment that was pitiful to see on a face so young and fair, and there was something very reckless in the way she went dashing down the avenue, and through the great gate at its extremity.

She turned into a bridle-path that ran around and up the hill, from the lofty summit of which she knew she could see the river, whose angry roar grew every moment more distinct.

She reached the top in a little while, and caught her breath at the terrible grandeur of the view presented on all sides.

There, looking down in the distance before her, she saw Silverdale, with its drenched houses and inundated streets, and in front of it the mad currents of the swollen river, on which great logs and stumps were being whirled helplessly.

For several minutes she sat motionless on the back of White Foot, fascinated by the terrible sight; then she cast a wandering glance around.

As she did so, she uttered a startled exclamation, and the bright color which exercise and excitement had brought into her face died out, and her blue eyes were distended with horror.

There on her right, where the rocks of the ravine were usually visible far below, she saw a torrent whose great, yellow waves leaped and roared madly along.

But the sight which had struck the color from her face was Granny Dean's cottage submerged almost to the top of the door in the wild waters that were plunging against, and threatening to bear it away on their mad bosom.

Where was the old woman and her granddaughter?

Were they drowned?

"My God!" Miss Vance muttered, as these questions rushed through her mind. "The water rose in the night! Probably they were drowned while sleeping in their bed!"

Something must be done.

She wheeled her horse about, and bringing her whip sharply down on his neck, she dashed away, thinking to raise an alarm in the village.

Her way led down the hill on the side opposite the terrible ravine, and, of course, hidden from it.

At a turn in the tangled bridle-path she came in sight of a gigantic figure walking hurriedly along, and at the sudden and unexpected obstacle it presented in the narrow way, her horse shied, almost upsetting her.

The man grasped the bit, and so steadied the animal.

"Oh, Barry Tempest, I am so glad to meet you!" Kate cried out, leaning her white face toward him over the pommel of her saddle. "Granny Dean's house is almost washed away, and I am afraid the old woman and Electra are drowned! I want help for them!"

The words had scarcely fallen from her lips, when Tempest's hand dropped from its clutch on her bridle-bit, and his herculean form was climbing rapidly up the hill, and his swarthy face was as colorless as her own.

She pursued her way to the village, which, owing to the narrow, slippery road she was compelled to traverse, was necessarily slow, and Barry Tempest went on impetuously toward the ravine,

It was really only a few minutes, and yet it seemed ages to him before he came in sight of that little house, and as he saw it, a groan broke from him.

There it was, more than half submerged in the yellow waves, and trembling from the force with which they broke against it.

Those maddened waters, for a distance of fifteen feet, roared between him and the little house which he believed, with a frenzy of despair coming over him, held the drowned body of the only woman he had ever loved—of the woman for whom he would willingly have died a thousand times, if it were possible.

Without a moment of consideration, he threw off his coat, and plunged into the seething flood.

Excitement gave him almost superhuman strength, and he swam as man never swam before, beating back with his arms the strong waters that uprooted saplings in their mad career as if they had been rye straws.

They contended every inch with him, but he made his way steadily through them, and at last he grasped the upper lintel of the door and climbed on the roof, from which he began to wrench the shingles, all the time calling Electra's name.

He had no hope that her voice would respond to his agonized call; he had no hope beyond the horrible one of seeing her dead body floating on the imprisoned water in the house when he had torn off the intervening shingles.

He felt the log structure trembling under him as he worked, and knew that it threatened to fall to pieces at every blow of the floating timber which the waves hurled against it.

Still he worked on, and in a minute's time he had made an opening large enough to admit his head, and he bent and peered into the darkness below, calling:

"Electra! Electra!"

Then a hand was thrust up, which clutched his long black hair desperately, and the voice of Electra cried out, frantically:

"Save us! Save us!"

"I'll do it, my girl, or I'll die with you!" he responded, with a great shout.

And then he began to tear away the shingles again, in order that the narrow space might be widened sufficiently to admit of her body being dragged through it.

She had crept up into the crazy loft, and there being no light in it save that which penetrated through crevices in the broken shingles, he but dimly saw the form he drew up with difficulty through the opening he had made.

But when that form was trembling beside him on the roof, he uttered a malediction.

It was not Electra, but her grandmother.

He plunged his arms through the opening again.

"Electra! Electra!" he cried, hoarsely; and this time her arms were lifted to his, and in an instant she, too, was drawn out on the roof.

"Save grandmother," she said, cowering down, quivering from head to foot, with her face hidden in her hands.

"There is time to save only you?" Barry Tempest responded hoarsely, twining his arms around her. "In another minute the cabin will go to pieces!"

She wrenched herself from him and cried out:

"No—no! if grandmother dies, I will die with her. Save her, you will have time—and then come for me. I will cast myself into the water and drown before your eyes, if she is left here!"

She was desperately in earnest; and realizing it, Barry Tempest again reached out his arms to take her by force.

"I swear I will not live if she is left to die!" Electra cried, fiercely, striking out at him so as to prevent his clasping her in his arms. "If you love me, Barry Tempest, save my grandmother!"

At that appeal, Barry Tempest threw his left arm around the half-unconscious old woman, and sprung with her into the waves, leaving Electra on the roof of the cabin, that threatened, at every moment, to go to pieces.

It was a terrible struggle, that fight against the waves, encumbered as he was by the terrified old woman, and nothing but superhuman strength could have enabled him to reach the land with her.

The waves beat against him, and tossed him back and forth, but still he struggled on, feeling how terribly precious every movement was if he would save the life of the woman he loved, who was clinging to the crazy roof, and watching him, and waiting for him to return for her.

He reached the shore, and threw the form of the old woman beyond the reach of the water, and then he sprung into the flood again and made his way back again toward the cabin.

But like the horrible changes of a nightmare dream, he saw the cabin suddenly go to pieces, and then he saw Electra clinging to one of the floating logs against which she had been thrown.

Barry Tempest uttered a terrible cry, and then he struck out again, swimming as man never swam before, and upheld by a strength which was superhuman.

For the first time in all his life of loneliness and neglect, a prayer rose to his lips, and fell mutteringly from them:
“Lord, let me save her!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

BARRY TEMPEST saw Electra clinging desperately to the log which a minute before had held a position in the wall of the cabin, but which was now being driven madly down the torrent.

Would her frail hold upon it be broken, or would a merciful, pitying Providence permit her to maintain it until he could reach her?

It was easier to keep himself afloat upon the downward current than it was to breast it, as he had been forced to do before. But then his hard struggle had been so far successful that he had reached Electra, while now she swept on before him like an *ignis fatuus*, and the distance between them seemed never to change.

He saw her clinging always to the log, desperately, while the cruel waters strove mightily to wrench that uncertain support from her, and with powerful strokes of his arms he assisted the current in propelling himself downward.

He was gaining on Electra slowly but surely, and he shouted to her again and again to have courage, to keep fast hold on the log and that he would save her.

He saw her face turned toward him, and her wild terrified eyes fixed imploringly on him for an instant, while she called out to him.

But what her words were he did not hear, and the next moment the log had entered a whirlpool and began a series of swift gyrations, the very first of which loosened her hold on the slippery surface, and as she uttered a piercing scream, the sharp end of the log struck her on the head, and she disappeared under the surface, leaving a crimson stain that for an instant was apparent on the muddy waters, and then was swept away.

The chance which loosened her hold on the log, and the whirlpool which detained her for a moment or so in its turbulent breast, worked in Barry Tempest's favor; it enabled him to reach the spot just as she arose to the surface.

He caught her in his arms, or rather in his left arm, for it required the active exertions of his right arm to keep them afloat, and naturally enough he did not notice how limp and dead she lay on his breast.

“Don't give way—I'll save you,” he said, with his lips close to her ear.

Then began the hard fight with death, the same struggle he made with Granny Dean in his arms, he made now with Electra, only the struggle he made now was to save something dearer far than his own life, something, the loss of which would render his existence valueless.

He was struggling to save the life of the woman he loved.

Only a few feet separated him from the shore, but it was a distance filled with leaping, roaring, seething billows.

Yet it must be crossed over, for only beyond those billows lay safety for her.

So he struggled on desperately, and Death contested every inch with him, and yielded very slowly to his exertions.

But it did yield, for after what seemed a long time, he climbed out on the shore, with the inanimate form of Electra in his arms, and sank down on the wet ground with her head pillowed on his breast.

He was something of a Hercules in proportion, and something of a Samson in strength, but the terrible exertion he had gone through had exhausted him; and as he sank down on the ground, and knew that she was safe from the hungry water, there came a queer ringing in his ears, and then thick darkness settled over him, as if it were an impenetrable cloud, shutting out from his sight the pale face lying there on his breast.

So he did not see the horrible cut on her head from which the blood issued, turning her black hair red where it ran down to her neck, marking crimson streaks upon it.

So, he did not see how much the whiteness of her face resembled the whiteness of death, nor how much the silence and stillness that was over her resembled the silence and stillness of death.

So he did not know when she was taken from his arms by the party whom Kate Vance had summoned to go to the rescue at the village; neither did Electra know it, wrapped as she was in that unconsciousness, which, if it was not death, at least resembled it as nearly as one thing can resemble another.

Of the three who had been on the roof of that trembling cabin, seeing and hearing and feeling the blows of the waves upon it—of the three who had struggled in those waves and been buffeted by them, only Granny Dean knew when she was borne, weeping piteously, while her garments dripped forlornly, as if they, too, were shedding tears, into the Red Star tavern at Silverdale.

"Is 'Lec dead? Is my pretty dearie dead?" she asked tremulously, for at least the twentieth time, as she was borne into a comfortable room by two men, one of whom supported her on either side, and who chanced to be the

mild host of the Red Star and his aristocratic boarder, Ray Sylvane.

"We can't tell yet," the landlord responded. "I hope not—I hope not, indeed. But we can't tell yet."

Ray Sylvane said nothing, but his face wore a strangely white, set look.

Was she dead?

He, too, was mentally asking that question.

His sensitive nature was filled with remorse which had been swift to overtake him when he looked on the still form and marble-like face of Electra Dean, remembering that she had loved him—that she had, in her ingenuousness or impetuosity, almost told him so, and that he had treated her, if not with disdain, at least with coldness.

They had changed her wet garments for dry ones; they had sent for the village physician, who had used restoratives as yet without avail, for no sign of life appeared on the white rigidity of the beautiful face, and he began to shake his head despondently over his work.

A lump came into Ray Sylvane's throat as he looked down upon her, which threatened to choke him.

He turned abruptly and went out of the room in which there was such confusion reigning around the bed on which they had laid her, and he went away to his own private apartment.

There he began to pace up and down the room with an exceedingly troubled look on his colorless face.

"Yes, I will do it!" he said, halting in his walk, and speaking with slow distinctness. "If she lives I will make reparation for all the pain my brutal coldness must have cost her. If she lives I will offer to dedicate my life to her!"

He lifted his hand as he spoke, and then he lifted his eyes for an instant, and added:

"So help me God!"

The weak sentimentality which had caused him to take that oath, did not awaken any enthusiasm within him, evidently—for every particle of color was struck from his face, and every gleam from his eyes, as he muttered:

"So help me God!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

TANGLED THREADS.

THE most powerful physical organization, while presenting a stronger resistance to disease than the weaker one does, is nevertheless much slower to recover from any attack of that kind—just as a great tree is harder to fell,

and correspondingly harder to raise again, than is the sapling.

This fact was evidenced in the case of Barry Tempest.

When he had fallen into that state of insensibility consequent upon his terrible mental and physical strain, it seemed as if he would never arouse to consciousness again. For it was an hour before he opened his eyes and stared blankly at the familiar articles of his own little room at the Red Star which met his view.

He was like one who had just awakened from a deep, dreamless sleep, which had left both his mind and body in a sluggish state; and he fancied, as his glance noted the gray light coming in from the leaden sky, that day had just broken, and that it was only a little past his usual hour of rising.

He sprung from his bed, and an unusual stiffness about his elbows was the first reminder that came to him of the deadly peril in which he had been.

Then it all rushed through his memory with swiftmess, and also with the appalling effect of a flash of lightning.

"Electra! Where was Electra! Was she still among the living?"

He remembered that her head had lain heavy on his breast, that her form had rested limply on his arm when that buzzing had come into his ears, and that swift, impenetrable darkness over his eyes.

He rushed from his room, and in the hall he encountered the village physician, who was a mild-voiced, mild-eyed young man.

Tempest grasped his arm.

"Where is Electra Dean?" he asked, hoarsely.

The doctor motioned with both hand and head toward a door opening on the little hall, and Barry Tempest strode to it, and unceremoniously turned the knob and went in, and the physician followed.

He saw Electra lying, white and still, where they had placed her on the bed, and the sad-faced German woman, Wilhelmine Bachman, was bending over her, softly touching the broad bandage around her head.

Barry Tempest thrust her roughly aside, and bent over the motionless girl.

A moment after he lifted his head again, and turned his face, which had grown ashy and was beaded with great drops.

"What ails her?" he said hoarsely, grasping the physician's arm and dragging him to the bedside. "Is she dead?"

The man of medicine shook his head and knotted his brow.

"That is the trouble," he said, pointing to the bandage. "Her skull is badly fractured."

"But she is not dead?" Barry Tempest said, his strong fingers tightening into an iron-like grip on the doctor's arm.

Again the man of medicine shook his head.

"Not dead," he answered, "but in a state of unconsciousness from which she may rally, or she may not. The result is doubtful. If she does recover, she will likely be without reason."

Barry Tempest shrank back, and dropped heavily into the chair which the German woman had placed at the head of the bed a short time before, and he asked no more questions, nor made any further remarks, but his alert black eyes watched every effort which the doctor, assisted by Wilhelmine Bachman, made to restore Electra to consciousness.

After awhile old Granny Dean hobbled into the room, fell to weeping when she caught sight of her granddaughter; and bending tremulously over her to rain kisses on the pale face.

"You can't do any good here, old lady," the doctor said, meaning no unkindness, but fearing that her grief would be troublesome, "so you had better go back to your own room."

But Wilhelmine Bachman placed her large, plump hand on the old woman's shoulder and said quietly:

"She won't do any harm, doctor; let her stay."

So Granny Dean, urged by that large, kind hand, moved tremulously around to a chair at the foot of the bed, and cried and mumbled incoherently of the terrible freshet, and of Electra's thoughtfulness and bravery in dragging her to a place of safety above the surging waters in the loft of the crazy cabin.

The long hours of the day dragged on and Barry Tempest sat there, never moving except to do something for Electra, and never lifting his eyes from her face, so beautiful in its death-like repose, except at those moments when he was aiding in some effort for her recovery, and hearing the roaring of the river as it plunged and dashed along outside.

As the day went down, so also that angry flood subsided; but the life which seemed to be such a feeble spark in the frame of Electra Dean refused to die out utterly, but still burned on and on, and slowly but surely it gathered strength.

The night fell and drifted on into its black noon.

The dingy and dusty clock standing on the mantel, after a hoarse gurgling in its throat, began to strike the mid-

night hour, and as its first stroke rang sharply out, the closed lids of the wounded girl quivered, a spasmodic movement went over her, and then her eyes opened and looked vacantly around.

"'Lec, do you know me?"

It was Barry Tempest's gruff tones, now sharp with anxiety, that put the question to her.

She heard him, evidently, for her eyes turned with a meaningless stare to his face, but she did not speak.

He repeated the question, laying his large, rough hands softly on her bandaged forehead; but still she made no attempt to answer him.

Her eyes, those great, beautiful black eyes, which he had seen scintillating with passion so often were dull enough now, and they left his face, and wandered vacantly around the room.

The physician bent over her and spoke to her, but she did not heed his words any more than she had those of Barry Tempest, and he shook his head, saying to Wilhelmine Bachman, but in a tone loud enough to be distinctly audible to Barry Tempest also:

"Just as I expected. She will live, but her reason is gone. That blow on her head has injured her brain."

"It may be only for a time, may it not?" the sad voice of the German woman asked. "It is not impossible for her to recover her reason, is it?"

"Not impossible, but very improbable," the physician answered. "It will likely be a long time first, if she ever does."

That was the opinion he gave to Ray Sylvane, when he met him in the morning out on the veranda.

The young man turned away from him, and began to pace slowly up and down the long, narrow floor, with his forehead knotted with thought.

"If her mind remains darkened," he muttered to himself, while the physician strolled away toward the falling river, "it will put an end to all prospect of a reconciliation between Kate and myself, because, of course, she could never make the explanation which would be needed to insure that result. I must always appear despicable in Kate Vance's eyes."

As he said that, the knots grew deeper on his face, and he caught his lip between his teeth, and gnawed it so fiercely that a drop of blood issued from it and stained his brown mustache.

Three times more he walked up and down the length of the veranda, and then he began to mutter again, with the bright flush dying out of his face:

"In two weeks and three days more the fourth of Octo-

ber will be here, and unless Miss Bachman recognizes Max Rosenfield in Von Hirschberg, and declares him to be connected disgracefully with the theft of those diamonds, he and Kate will marry; I cannot prevent it."

And then a minute afterward he added, gnawing his lip cruelly between his words:

"Why should I want to prevent it? The oath I have sworn in regard to Electra Dean if she recovers her reason, will put a barrier of itself, between me and any woman but Electra. She loves me so well, poor child, so much better than Kate Vance ever did or ever could do, that it was but just that I should have made that vow, and but just that I should keep it. Yes, if Electra Dean lives and recovers her reason, I will ask her to marry me, notwithstanding the great gulf of social position that lies between us. My life has been worthless to me ever since the tenth of April last. I may as well give it to a woman who loves me, as to waste it in gloomy repinings for one who does not care for me."

He seemed to be encouraging himself, to be arguing with himself; to be bracing himself up, as it were, for the performance of a hateful task, from which every instinct of his nature shrank.

A few minutes afterward, Wilhelmine Bachman came out on the veranda, and he turned to her and asked abruptly:

"What do you think of Miss Dean's condition? The doctor says that she will be likely never to recover her reason!"

"I think the doctor is mistaken," Wilhelmine answered quietly, "I think she will recover her mind. It may be some time first, but I think it will come back after awhile. Something tells me so, and for the sake of that poor man, who loves her so devotedly, I pray that she may."

She nodded as she spoke toward Barry Tempest, who had left the house and was going toward the stables with his head bowed as Ray Sylvane had never seen it bowed before, and the sight touched him with pity.

A fellow feeling had suddenly been awakened in his breast for that rough, unlettered man; and a chord of sympathy trembled for him as he saw his tall, magnificent form going with such a sorrowful droop in it to the performance of his accustomed duties there at the Red Star.

Ray Sylvane for the first time was struck with the fact that he occupied exactly the same position toward Barry Tempest, that Von Hirschberg occupied toward him.

He stood between him and the woman he loved.

"It is a terrible tangle," Ray Sylvane muttered, draw-

ing his hand unsteadily across his damp forehead. "God help us both, Barry Tempest!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FOURTH OF OCTOBER.

THE September days glided by, each dropping an additional tinge of crimson, brown, and gold on the foliage of the trees and shrubs, and on the long lines of the grass.

The wind played on the strings of nature with a more decided touch, and those strings gave back a sharper sound than when the tender green clothed hill and vale.

To Ray Sylvane the crisp breaking of the rustling things under foot, seemed sharp utterances of pain, because of the ceaseless and irritating pain at his heart.

To Barry Tempest no such poetic fancies came, he heard no sympathetic voices in nature. His sensibilities were not delicate enough for that; but he did know that he was very miserable--that his heart was as as heavy as a stone in his breast.

He had no pleasure save in the society of Electra Dean. Although she never spoke one word to him.

Since the morning of the feshet, when she had been brought dripping and wounded into the Red Star, no one had ever heard the sound of her voice.

In the singular, and complete forgetfulness of all the past, which had settled over her after that awful blow on her head, her knowledge of words and speech seemed also to have been lost.

Certain it is that she made no response to any word that was addressed to her, and only indicated her wants by signs. She did that, too, in a dumb, vague way, like one who was asleep.

If she evinced a shade of partiality for anything, or anybody, it was for Wilhelmine Bachman and Barry Tempest.

She was very restless, moving, in a circumscribed circle, aimlessly about, and never quiet for an instant when she was awake, except when the hand of Barry Tempest, or of the German woman rested on her shoulder.

Then she would some times sit down on the grass, and stare in an apathetic way at the river; and it was at such times, with his restraining hand controlling her, that Barry Tempest was happiest.

Granny Dean and Electra had remained at the Red Star ever since that terrible morning.

That very day the kind-hearted landlord had said to Ray Sylvane, in his simple, earnest way:

"I'll let the old lady and 'Lec stay here. I'll never miss

what they eat. And the room they take won't make no great odds."

Ray Sylvane had answered, looking straight into the mild face of the man:

"You're a generous person, John Goldman. Take me into partnership with you, let me share in the support of that old woman and her helpless granddaughter."

John Goldman was a man of few words, and less book learning, but his own great, generous heart taught him to understand another. So he comprehended that he would confer a favor on Ray Sylvane by permitting him, out of his abundance, to contribute something to the support of those two helpless waifs whom fortune had brought under his roof.

In a few words the bargain was struck, and only John Goldman and Ray Sylvane knew that they had constituted themselves financially the guardians of old Granny Dean and Electra.

Since the morning Kate Vance had brought that startling piece of news to the village—the news of the submerged cabin in the ravine—she had not been in Silverdale. But it was well known there, and in all the country round about, that she was busy with grand preparations for her wedding with Von Hirschberg.

Letters, addressed always in the same stiff hand, and post-marked at various places, came regularly to her once or twice each week, and John Goldman's clerk knew that they came from Von Hirschberg, because Miss Vance's mail-carrier always deposited as many in the office directed in her delicate chirography to Count Von Hirschberg.

Wilhelmine Bachman also remained a guest of the Red Star.

Always wearing a look which was a strange blending of patience and determination, she waited for the bridegroom expected on the fourth of October at Silver Bend to arrive.

Ray Sylvane remembered that Harker had told him Mrs. Dulany suspected this woman, Wilhelmine Bachman, of having stolen her jewels, and he had been impressed at the time with the idea that the detective himself seemed not to share in the suspicion, and seemed always to regard the woman more as a witness against Max Rosenfield, her missing lover, than as the real culprit.

After seeing Wilhelmine Bachman, Ray Sylvane did not wonder any further on that point. He only wondered how Mrs. Dulany could have entertained a moment's suspicion against any one wearing such a face as that of the German woman.

"If Harker knew she was here, however, he would arrest her in order to force her to testify against some one else, perhaps," Ray muttered to himself as he sat in his own room on the night of her arrival. "I believe she can be trusted to go her own way. I believe she will unmask Von Hirschberg if it is possible for her to do it. So I shall not inform Harker of her presence here. She shall bide her time until Von Hirschberg returns, which will not be long now to wait."

As the days glided by, Ray Sylvane held to that resolve, and kept his peace in regard to Wilhelmine Bachman.

That first conversation in regard to Von Hirschberg which he had held with her had also been the last.

She waited in silence, and he knew for what she waited, and also kept silence on the subject.

So time passed on—the sun rose and set over the monotonous days, which brought no change to any of the parties interested in this story, except an additional intensity of the fever of unrest which possessed them—and at last the eventful fourth of October arrived.

It was a beautiful, golden day, and the clouds that floated across the deep blue sky were like pillows of golden light, and the hills and valleys surrounding Silverdale were like altars of ripe fruit and rich flowers.

"I expect Von Hirschberg will come up on the boat to-day," John Goldman remarked at the breakfast table.

Ray Sylvane was not there. He was roaming over the hills, as he had been doing ever since daybreak, when he had lifted his feverish head from a sleepless pillow. So there was no one present so interested in the observation of the good landlord as Wilhelmine Bachman.

She dropped her knife and fork, and turned her large blue eyes full on his face as she asked, quietly:

"What time is the boat due here?"

"About twelve o'clock," John Goldman answered. "It hardly ever gets here before that time."

Wilhelmine said no more. She toyed with the morsels on her plate for awhile, and then she pushed back her plate, and leaving her breakfast almost untasted, she went out of the dining-room, and turned her steps in the direction of her own chamber.

As she passed down the hall, through the open hall door she caught a glimpse of Electra, who was wandering slowly along the banks of the now quiet, silvery river alone.

Instead of going to her own room, as she had intended to do, Wilhelmine turned her steps in the direction of the river bank also.

She reached Electra's side, and placed her hand familiarly on her arm.

The bright black eyes of the girl were instantly turned upon her, and she noticed something in their expression which she had not seen before. For the first time, too, she heard the sound of the poor girl's voice:

"Flowers! Flowers!"

Electra enunciated the syllables eagerly, pointing as she did so away to the hills, between which ran the old, familiar ravine.

She quickened her steps, and Wilhelmine, struck dumb with surprise, followed her.

So, with Electra leading, and Wilhelmine following, they went away to the hill overlooking the spot where the little cottage of Granny Dean had stood so long.

It was the first time Electra had seen the spot since the time of the freshet, and it seemed to stir some chord of memory in her vacant mind.

She stared helplessly at the place for a few minutes, and then she asked in a piteous, childish way:

"Where is the house?"

Wilhelmine could not catch her meaning, for she looked on the place for the first time, so she made an evasive answer, and led the young girl away toward the village again.

Time had passed rapidly and imperceptibly.

It was high noon when the creaking sign of the Red Star burst in their sight again.

In the hall of the hotel, they met Ray Sylvane.

His face was strangely disturbed, and there was a wild, feverish glitter in his eyes.

He stopped Wilhelmine with a touch of his hand on her arm.

"Do you know that he has come?" he asked, eagerly.

"Who has come?" Wilhelmine responded, a dash of red coming into her face. "I have seen no one. I have been walking over the hills."

"Von Hirschberg," Ray responded. "He came on the boat an hour ago. He has gone to Silver Bend."

"Then I will go to Silver Bend also," Wilhelmine said quietly, although a tremor ran over her. "I cannot endure this suspense an hour longer than is necessary."

She turned from him as she spoke, leaving Electra with him, and went swiftly away in the direction of Silver Bend.

"I must know if he is Max Rosenfield," she muttered. "I must see whether I shall interfere with that marriage to-night, or let it go on."

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNMASKED.

IN the luxurious parlor at Silver Bend Kate Vance was sitting, in company with Count von Hirschberg.

The sunshine that fell in such a glow of old gold on the pine-trees, and on the roof and walls of the great, old-fashioned mansion, stole in through crevices in the closed blinds of the window, and lay in glistening arrows here and there on the roses of the velvet carpet.

The room was adorned with wreaths and knots of ever-greens and rare flowers, and all the atmosphere was filled with their odors.

"In a few hours now," Von Hirschberg said, looking at his betrothed through the gold-rimmed glasses with which he had adorned his Roman nose—"in a few hours now de crown of my happiness will haf come. You vill be my wife."

Was there something terrible in the prospect that the beautiful face of Miss Vance should have taken such a deathly hue?

Certain it is that the expression of those perfect features changed.

It had not been a happy expression before, not such as one would naturally look to see on the face of an expectant bride—far from it. But it changed to one of absolute misery as he said that.

He reached out to take her hand, but she frustrated the design by rising quickly, and going to the center-table, on the marble slab of which a waiter of creamy blossoms shone, and bending over them, she hid her face for an instant over their fragrant leaves, while two tears fell from her eyes upon them, as if they were drops of dew.

At that instant the faint tinkling of a bell came softly through the stillness, which she heard through the leaden despair that was over her without noticing.

Von Hirschberg heard it, also, but the faint sound did not disturb him; it conveyed no warning of impending calamity to him.

He was flushed with a sense of triumph; he was secure in the fortune which had ruled his suit so far, giving him success when he had scarcely hoped for it, and he had faith in his good luck.

He felt that it would abide with him to the end now—to the end which was so near, and which would see him the husband of the beautiful heiress, who in the recklessness of her mood had plighted her troth to him.

He heard, without heeding it, the step of the servant passing along the hall outside to the front door. He heard

also the opening of the front door without any feeling of concern, for his eyes and thoughts were fixed on the beautiful woman bending still over the waiter of flowers.

It was only when the parlor door unclosed that his attention was attracted.

He glanced around; so, also, did Miss Vance.

There on the threshold of the parlor, with her eyes fixed on Von Hirschberg, was Wilhelmine Bachman!

The color fled from the swarthy face of the German, and he sat like one suddenly paralyzed, and gazed at Wilhelmine as if she were a visitant from the grave.

Kate looked at her in surprise for a few seconds, and then she went forward, and halted before her, saying:

"Will you walk in, and have a chair, madam?"

The great, blue eyes of Wilhelmine, which had been fixed in that persistent gaze on Von Hirschberg, turned to Kate for the first time.

"Thank you," she said, speaking slowly, and in a strained, unnatural way.

She walked past Kate then, and advanced toward Von Hirschberg and halted before him.

She was about to speak to him, but she began to tremble so that she sank down on the sofa beside him, in the place Miss Vance had occupied a few minutes before.

He shrank away, and made a movement to rise, but her large hand fell upon his shoulder and detained him, while she said, with a quiver and break in her rich voice:

"Max, how could you behave so treacherously by me, when you knew how fully I trusted your love; when you knew how much I have borne, how much punishment I have taken from my conscience for your sake?"

He had collected himself, as it were, by this time; the color had come back into his face in a dark tide, and his eyes gleamed defiantly through his glasses as he turned them upon her.

"I know nothing about you, woman," he said, angrily, and with an effort at scorn; "Vat do you mean by coming to a gentleman and calling him by a name dat is not his name?"

Her lips were compressed and her sorrowful blue eyes looked earnestly, reproachfully into his for a half minute before she spoke, and her tone was inexpressibly sad, but wonderfully decisive:

"There is no use for you to attempt to deceive me, Max Rosenfield; I, of all persons in the world, would be hardest for you to deceive."

Kate Vance had remained standing at the door, utterly bewildered, staring at the visitor and listening to her incomprehensible words.

As if moved by a sudden impulse she went forward.

"Evidently you have made a mistake, madam. This gentleman is Count von Hirschberg," she said, dropping into a chair in front of the sofa on which they were sitting.

"Of course, she has made a mistake; of course I am de Count von Hirschberg!" he said, savagely, shaking his head in a warning way at Wilhelmine.

Again she compressed her lips, and fixed that reproachful look on his face before she responded, and this time her words were addressed to Miss Vance:

"I am very sorry, indeed, for your sake, if you are Miss Vance, to say that you are mistaken in supposing him to be Count von Hirschberg, or any one else except Max Rosenfield. It gives me a great deal of pain, to tell you something that I feel it is my duty to tell you, because I know it will cause a great deal of trouble and mortification. But this man is already married. His name is Max Rosenfield, and he is my husband."

"It is not true!" he cried, fury coming over him, so that he raised his hand, and would have dealt a blow with it in the face of his denouncer, had she not lifted her own strong hands, and caught and held it firmly.

Her face was deathly pale, but her voice was low and calm as she said:

"You forget yourself, Max."

"What does this mean. Is what this woman says true?"

It was Kate Vance's voice, although strained and hoarse, that asked the question, and it was Miss Vance's hand that pressed heavily on his shoulder.

He glanced up into her face, and he shrank and cowered, but he said, persisting in his bravado:

"No—it is not true, it is false, it is as false as de devil!"

When he said that, Miss Vance sank back into her chair, and looked from one to the other of them, with her breath coming in gasps through her parted lips.

The expression on Wilhelmine's face had never changed for an instant, it was a blending of touching sadness and firm resolve, which marked her voice also, and gave to both an undeniable character of truth, which Kate Vance felt while looking at one, and listening to the other.

"It seems to me that it would hardly be necessary for me to bring any positive proof of my assertion to cause you to defer your marriage, at any rate, until you could ascertain if what I have told you is true. Because it would be a terrible thing for you to marry a man who has already a living wife. But I can give you proof that I think you may, perhaps, recognize. He has let his hair grow long, and has shaven off his beard since this picture

was taken; but you see the eye and brow and nose are the same."

She had taken a photograph from her pocket which she handed to Miss Vance as she spoke.

"It is a slander," Von Hirschberg kept on repeating, darting menacing glances at Wilhelmine.

Miss Vance took the picture and scrutinized it, lifting her eyes only to compare the features with the working ones of the man there before her, who in a few hours would have been her husband but for this.

At the bottom of the picture was written, in the same stiff, black characters which she had come to know so well:

"Max Rosenfield to his beloved wife, Wilhelmine."

Miss Vance's face was as white and rigid as if it had been carved from marble, and her voice had a far-off sound as she gave the photograph back into the hands of Wilhelmine, saying:

"The features are the same. He is your husband, I believe. Take him out of my sight, please."

"It is false!" Von Hirschberg cried, springing to his feet. "De marriage shall take place. She is a slanderer. Until now, I haf never laid eyes on her. I vill gif her over to de police!"

For the first time a tinge of color came into Wilhelmine's face.

Her dormant anger had been aroused by his threat.

"Be careful, Max Rosenfield," she said, with that ring of truth clearly evident in her voice, "that I do not give you over to the police! And I will do it—as much as I have loved you—I will do it if you do not return to Mrs. Dulany the diamonds you stole from her. The secret has weighed on my conscience until it has almost killed me. I ran away from the Astor House to keep from telling on you, but I determined all the time to expose you if you did not return the diamonds to their proper owner."

That declaration—that the man she had agreed to marry, the man whom she had, indeed, come so near marrying, was a sneak-thief—acted on the already overstrained nerves of proud Kate Vance like the fabled feather that broke the camel's back. She gave way utterly, and fell to the floor in a death-like swoon.

Wilhelmine sprung to the bell-cord and jerked it vigorously, while Von Hirschberg, or Rosenfield, strode toward the door.

Wilhelmine followed him.

In the hall they encountered the servant who came hurrying toward the parlor, alarmed by the violence of the summons on the bell.

"Your mistress is ill in the parlor," Wilhelmine said, briefly; and then she followed after Von Hirschberg or Rosenfield down the avenue of pine-trees.

She overtook him and laid her hand on his arm.

"Max," she said, in her calm, musical voice, "evil ways are unhappy ones. Get into the straight path again. Let me return Mrs. Dulany's diamonds to her. You have not sold them, have you?"

"I have pawned them for five hundred dollars," he said sullenly.

"Then I will redeem them," she said, "for I have nearly one thousand dollars which my brother who died six weeks ago in New Orleans left me in his will. With what is left of it, I will buy a little business of some kind, where we can make an honest living. You will come back to me and begin life anew, won't you?"

"If you haf de money to make de home, I vill go to it," he responded, with the surliness to a great extent gone from his voice—and then after a minute, during which they had been walking along with her hand on his arm—he added:

"I get into bad ways when I get away from you."

"Then you had better stay with me, and never leave me," she responded earnestly.

"My baggage is at the Red Star," he said, as if suddenly reminded, "I must get it."

"We will go to the Red Star," Wilhelmine answered quietly. "I want to see some one there, and then, when the boat comes back this evening, which it will do at about six o'clock, we will leave Silverdale forever."

CHAPTER XXX.

A REVELATION.

RAY SYLVANE, with that terrible fever of unrest over him, was wandering, as he had been all day long through the woods, with a sense of loss heavy at his heart and brain.

He wanted no companion save nature—if it would have been possible to have done so, he would have become oblivious of his own identity even. Yet he was not alone—at least in the sense of spiritual companionship—for the unseen but keenly felt presence of his lost love, Kate Vance, was with him all the time.

It seemed to him that she was dead, and that he was weeping over her grave—only his sorrow was keener than it would have been if he had indeed been mourning her death.

He felt that she was lost to him, and the manner of that

loss was worse than it would have been, had she been snatched from him by the inevitable hand of death.

He had clung, unconsciously, to the hope that something would occur to prevent her marriage with Von Hirschberg.

She did not love Von Hirschberg; he felt sure of that, and that consciousness made the sacrifice of her marriage more terrible to him.

Now, he had given up the idea that anything would happen to prevent that marriage. The idea that Wilhelmine Bachman would find Von Hirschberg to be an impostor—a hotel thief—had left him, so he wandered disconsolately through the woods alone.

Late in the evening he strolled down toward the river.

Far up the stream he saw the smoke of the steamboat, and heard its signal whistle to land at the wharf of Silverdale.

In the aimlessness of his wanderings he stationed himself at a point overlooking the wharf, where he could see the boat, while he should remain unseen by any one at the landing.

The sun was going down, like a drowning thing in billows of red clouds, and the warm glow fell like a mist of glory on the boat, and on the people thronging the landing.

As his eyes roved listlessly over the crowd, they were caught by two persons who were evidently preparing to embark on the steamer—and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own vision, so startled was he by the unexpected sight of one of those persons.

It was Von Hirschberg who, valise in hand, was waiting on the bank beside Wilhelmine Bachman!

Surely *he* did not intend to go away? Surely the valise in his hand was hers, and not his!

This thought flashed through the bewildered mind of Ray Sylvane, and without comprehending what he was doing really, he made his way rapidly down to the landing.

Wilhelmine was glancing eagerly around, as if in search of some one among the crowd, and when she caught sight of him, her large, mild eyes lit up with a gleam of pleasurable recognition, and she turned and went back to meet him, her hand extended toward him.

"I am glad you have come," she said, as he mechanically shook hands with her. "I wanted to see you before I left. I have something astonishing to tell you."

"Is it, what you have to tell me, that you have discovered anything about the man yonder?" he asked in an incoherent way, nodding toward Von Hirschberg, who was glancing back at them.

"No, it is not that," she answered; and seeing the shadow that fell over his face, she added:

"But I must tell you something astonishing about him, too. He is not Von Hirschberg, but Max Rosenfield, and my husband. I was secretly married to him the very day Mrs. Dulany's jewels disappeared, but at the time, I knew nothing of them. It was because I insisted upon having them returned to their rightful owner that he ran away from me. I don't think he was a deliberate thief, though. They were thrown in his way, and he yielded to a momentary temptation to take them. In less than three days Mrs. Dulany will have them again in her possession."

Ray Sylvane's face had grown as white as death. He fairly gasped for breath.

"And he will not marry Miss Vance?" he said, mutteringly.

Wilhelmine shook her head.

"He will not marry her," she said. "He is already my husband."

The warning bell of the boat sounded, and Von Hirschberg beckoned and called to her.

"I must go," she said, hurriedly. "What I had to tell you is that a most astonishing thing has occurred. Electra Dean has suddenly regained her mind!"

She shook hands with him, and turned and went hurriedly away to join her husband, with whom she entered the boat, and disappeared forever from Ray Sylvane's sight, although years afterward he heard from her, and learned that she was living with her husband in the far West, and that he had developed into a first-rate farmer, whose excellence as a husband and citizen in his wild region was held as something remarkable.

The boat pushed away from the shore, and Ray Sylvane stood staring after it like one in a dream.

But it was a blissful dream, for Kate—his beloved Kate—was not to be married that evening to Von Hirschberg!

For several minutes that idea excluded all others from his mind. Then, with the suddenness of an electric shock, he remembered what she had told him about Electra Dean.

He remembered, also, at that moment, the solemn vow he had made to offer himself in marriage to the girl if she should recover her reason.

And she had recovered it.

Great drops broke out on his forehead. He staggered like a drunken man, and then he turned, and went in a blind, unsteady way to the hotel.

The first person he met was Electra Dean, who was standing alone on the veranda, with the warm glow of the sunset lighting up her picturesque beauty.

At the first glance he cast upon her he saw the change which had been wrought in her in a few hours.

The black eyes she turned on him were filled with the unmistakable light of reason.

She was looking after the large, fine form of Barry Tempest, who had evidently just parted from her, for he was passing from the veranda toward the stables, where his charges waited for him in the shape of a half dozen horses.

"The sooner it is over with the better," Ray Sylvane muttered to himself, wetting his parched lips with his tongue.

Then he went straight up to her where she stood on the veranda, and as she turned her black eyes upon him he said:

"You have gotten well at last, Electra."

"I have just waked up, I think," she said, knitting her arched brows and speaking in a puzzled tone. "I seem to have been asleep, and in a dream, only I remember the dream—parts of it, I mean—and the persons who were with me in it."

As she spoke she glanced toward Barry Tempest, who at the moment was disappearing in the stables, and a soft gleam came into her bright eyes.

"Yes, you have just awakened, as it were," Ray responded, speaking in a tone of dull despair, but in a very gentle one, notwithstanding, while his face still retained its white, set look. And then he added, the words falling hurriedly from his dry lips:

"I want to talk to you. I have something to tell you. Come with me into the parlor."

He passed on into the house as he spoke and she followed him, and they both entered the parlor.

Ray Sylvane threw himself on the sofa, and motioned her to take a seat beside him, which she mechanically did, with her face evincing keen curiosity, for she knew instinctively that what he had to say to her was a matter of vital importance to him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SCALES FALL.

For fully five minutes Ray Sylvane and Electra Dean sat there, side by side, on the worn sofa in the little parlor of the Red Star, without exchanging a word.

For days past, while the light of returning reason was struggling into her brain, it had seemed to the girl as if

she was slowly awakening from a mystifying dream, and she seemed to herself to be relapsing into its puzzling mists and shadows again as she sat there beside Ray Sylvane waiting for him to speak.

She noticed without understanding it that his face was deathly pale, and that it wore an expression of touching hopelessness.

He turned his eyes from her and fixed them on a fading line of sunset that streaked the dingy carpet, and ran his fingers tremulously up and down the links of his gold watch-chain as he spoke, the words coming rapidly from his lips:

"Electra, the fancy came to me some time ago that you cared for me more than I deserved that you should, perhaps, and that that was the reason that caused you to give me that drugged water which prevented my marriage with Kate Vance on the tenth of April last. That idea led me to forgive you for the act—was it true?"

At the blunt question her face flushed to a scarlet hue, and drooped low on her breast.

"No," she answered, speaking with an effort, and in a shamed voice. "When I poured some of grandmother's sleeping drops into the water, I only did it out of spite toward Miss Vance, because she had struck me with her riding-whip."

In that assertion she had spoken truthfully, for the strong fancy which took possession of her for him, came suddenly to her afterward when she had looked upon him lying so helplessly and unconsciously there in the starlight.

At the confession a bright color swept into Ray Sylvane's face, and a quick light leaped into his eyes.

He turned them upon her, warm with a great thankfulness, and said, reaching out his hand to clasp hers in the kindest touch he had ever bestowed upon her:

"I was mistaken, then—thank God that I was mistaken! It is so much better for us both as it is, because, feeling that I had, although unintentionally, interfered with your happiness. I vowed, if you lived through the terrible danger that followed your rescue from the torrent, and your reason was restored, to offer you my hand in marriage; and it would have been, I feel it now, a great wrong to you, and myself, too, because I had no love in my heart for you, save the love of a brother for a beautiful sister. It was to make that offer to you that I brought you in here a few minutes ago. But now it is not necessary that I should make it, seeing that I was so much mistaken in my judgment of your heart."

Her flushed face was still bent low over her breast, which rose and fell with the strength of some great emotion.

But she did not attempt to withdraw her hand from his warm clasp.

"I was mistaken in my own heart," she said, softly. "In that dream that I seemed to be in—that dream in which I was never happy except when I was with Barry Tempest, I either came to understand myself, or I underwent a change—I don't know which—I only know that when Wilhelmine told me this afternoon about the flood, and about how I was rescued from it, I suddenly recollected all about it. I had forgotten it before, and I felt that I owed my life to Barry Tempest, seeing that he had risked his own to save it, and it made me so happy to feel that I did owe it to him that I knew then how much more I cared for him than I had ever done for any one else. An hour ago I told him so, and I am going to give it over to his care all the rest of the days that he and I may be spared to live on earth."

Her low, musical voice thrilled with a power of feeling that Ray Sylvane had never heard in it before, and his own heart thrilled with an ecstasy of sympathetic joy.

"So, you are going to marry Barry Tempest?" he said, softly. He is a brave, loyal fellow. God bless him and you, too!"

"Yes, I am going to marry Barry Tempest," she responded, with a flutter of happiness in her voice. "But before I marry him, I am going to pay Miss Vance the debt of obligation I owe to her. Barry has told me that it was her who sent him to my rescue. She shall not go unrewarded for it. As sure as my name is Electra Dean I will do her a good turn for it!"

Ray Sylvane grasped her hand so tightly that she winced with the pain, and bent his face close to hers, which was turned toward him.

"What is the good return you intend to make?" he asked with hoarse intensity.

She sent a bright smile up to him from her red lips and her flashing eyes. Her whole being was thrilled with the great happiness of doing a good deed, and it was manifested in her voice as she answered:

"I am going to make that explanation to her that you asked me to make so many weeks ago. I am going to tell her whose fault it was that you were not at Silver Bend on the tenth of April!"

Ray Sylvane raised her hand to his lips and kissed it rapturously.

"Will you go now, this very hour?" he asked impatiently.

She nodded brightly, dislodging two tears from her eyes, as she rose to her feet saying:

"Yes. I will go now, right now, and in less than an hour and a half I shall bring you her forgiveness."

She glided from the room as she spoke, leaving him with his head whirling with mad joy.

From the window, he saw her a minute afterward passing rapidly away in the twilight with her face turned in the direction of Silver Bend.

Then, how slowly the time passed! How long that hour and a half was! It seemed to him, in the fever of his impatience as if it would never pass.

He ate no supper. When the bell sounded for that meal, instead of going on to the dining-room, he left the hotel and walked swiftly in the direction Electra had taken.

"I can't wait for her to come. I will go and meet her," he said to himself.

The twilight had deepened into night, but it was such a clear, beautiful moonlight night. Every object was distinctly visible for a long distance before him as he strode along the turnpike road in the direction of Silver Bend.

After awhile it revealed to him the graceful figure of Electra Dean coming swiftly toward him with her light, free step.

He almost ran to her.

"What did she say?" he asked, breathlessly, when he had come within a few yards of her.

"She says," Electra answered, shaking her crisp black curls saucily, "that she would rather tell you what she thinks about your conduct that evening herself. She has forgiven me for my share in it, and in proof of it she gave me this."

She held out her round arm, on which gleamed a gold bracelet, and then she dropped it to her side again, and flitted past him, going on her way to the Red Star, while he hurried on, with his heart in his throat, to Silver Bend, and to Kate Vance.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE LAST.

It was eight o'clock when Ray Sylvane rang the bell at Silver Bend.

He noticed that the house, which was to have been, for the second time lighted up for a wedding, was dark, except for a lamp that burned in the hall and another that burned in the library.

He asked the servant who answered his summons on the bell, if he could see Miss Vance.

The man shook his head.

"Miss Kate was ill," he said, "and he had been told to tell all the guests that came, that the marriage would not take place."

Ray saw that he had been mistaken for one of the wedding guests, and he drew a card from his pocket, and also a pencil, and under his name he wrote:

"Let me see you if only for five minutes."

"Give that to Miss Vance," he said, handing it to the man. "I will wait here for an answer."

The negro took the card and went away with it.

In a minute's time he returned.

"Walk into the library, Mr. Sylvane, Miss Kate will see you."

Trembling with excitement Ray followed him into the library, moving through the delicious and half-intoxicating odors which the flowers adorning the house breathed on the air, and waited for Miss Vance to appear.

He was not forced to endure the torture of impatience long.

In a few minutes he heard a light step in the hall, and the flutter of silken garments, and then Kate—his worshiped love—Kate, whom all day long he had been mourning as one mourns for the dead, stood before him.

He saw her halt a few feet inside the door, with the color coming and going on her beautiful face—a queen among women in her regal grace—and then—

His arms were around her, and her head was pillowed on his breast, and her heart was beating against his own!

They spoke no word, there was no need that they should. Each understood that a full, and blissful recognition had taken place between them, and there was no need to speak of the bitter past, to point to the wide gulf which had separated them.

After awhile, when they were sitting together on the sofa, and her eyes were looking up to his, from her pillow on his breast, the door-bell clanged discordantly, breaking through the sweet silence that was over them.

Kate sprung up, with a flush darkening her face.

"The wedding guests are arriving," she said. "There seems to be a stern intention on the part of fate to prevent me from marrying. Twice the project has been defeated."

Ray Sylvane, struck by a sudden thought, plunged his hand into his pocket and drew out a worn paper.

"This is the marriage license I obtained for you and me."

The step of the servant passing at the moment down the hall to the door, fell on his ear.

He ran forward and opened the door of the library, and spoke hurriedly to the man.

"Show the guest in, Miss Vance is better, and she will be married this evening."

"What do you mean?" Kate asked, standing wide-eyed in the center of the room.

"I mean just what I say," he answered, twining his arms around her. "You shall be married this evening, only there will be a change of bridegrooms, which there will be no necessity to explain to the visitors. Now that I have you I will not risk the chance of losing you again. The license is here, the guests are arriving, and the bride and groom are ready. I will let you go just long enough to don your wedding finery—if you so desire, but as for myself, you shall take me as I am!"

If she had meant to have objected to his arrangements, he gave her no opportunity of doing so, for the shower of kisses he rained on her lips.

"The marriage is set for nine o'clock," he said, glancing up at the timepiece on the mantel "it lacks just a half hour until then. You had best make haste, for promptly at the stroke of nine I will call at your door for you. Until then, I will go in and speak to your father."

Saying never a word, but in her blushing, trembling silence agreeing to his demand, she slipped from the library, and he rang the bell, and after writing a hurried note to her father, he sent it to the old gentleman, and waited for him to answer it.

He did so in a few minutes in person. Kate had already told him, before Ray's arrival at Silver Bend, of what Electra Dean had revealed to her, and he begged to apologize for his harsh words and treatment of the young man, and to assure him (which he did with tears in his eyes) of how very happy he was at the change in bridegrooms. He was rejoiced to have the marriage take place with Ray Sylvane in the place of Count von Hirschberg.

And so the marriage did take place at a few minutes of nine o'clock, the ceremony being performed by an Episcopalian clergyman, amid murmurs of surprise at the very different bridegroom from the person the invitations had announced.

But they settled into the conviction that it was a rather odd sort of a practical joke, gotten up for their entertainment; and they accordingly forgave it and one and all congratulated the newly made man and wife with merry smiles and playful reproaches at the species of humbuggery that had been practiced upon them.

They never knew any better either, for the only two out-

side parties that could have enlightened them, held their peace.

Those two were Electra Dean and Barry Tempest, who, in the course of three weeks, were also married, and were so far enriched by Mr. and Mrs. Ray Sylvane that they set up to housekeeping in a little cottage belonging to the estate of Silver Bend in a style that Granny Dean declared, "Did beat everything that ever she had expected that she and 'Lec and Barry Tempest would come to."

[THE END.]



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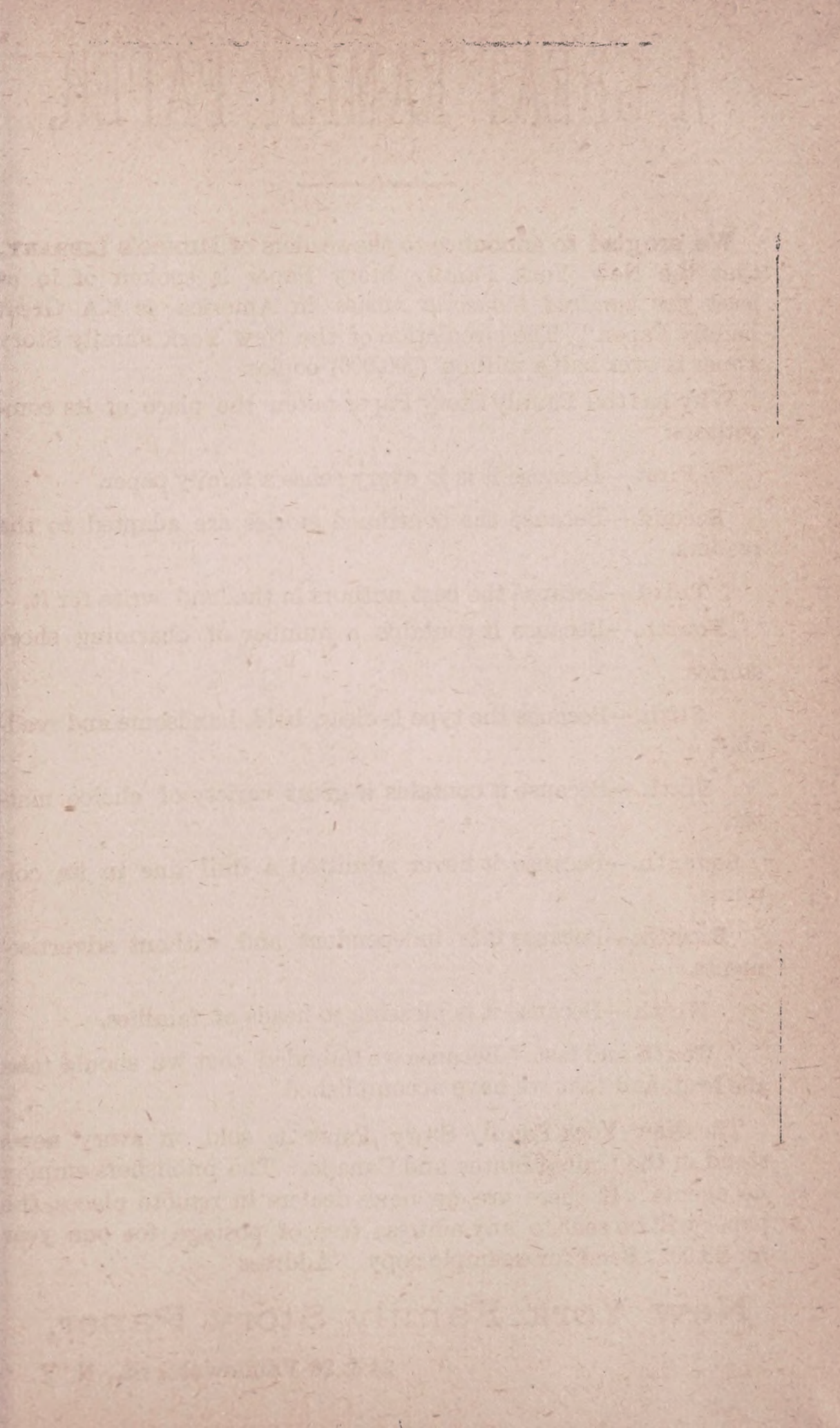
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